

Six Modern One-Act Plays

TREASURIES OF
MODERN PROSE

822.041-
BAR⁰⁸

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON PRESS LTD.



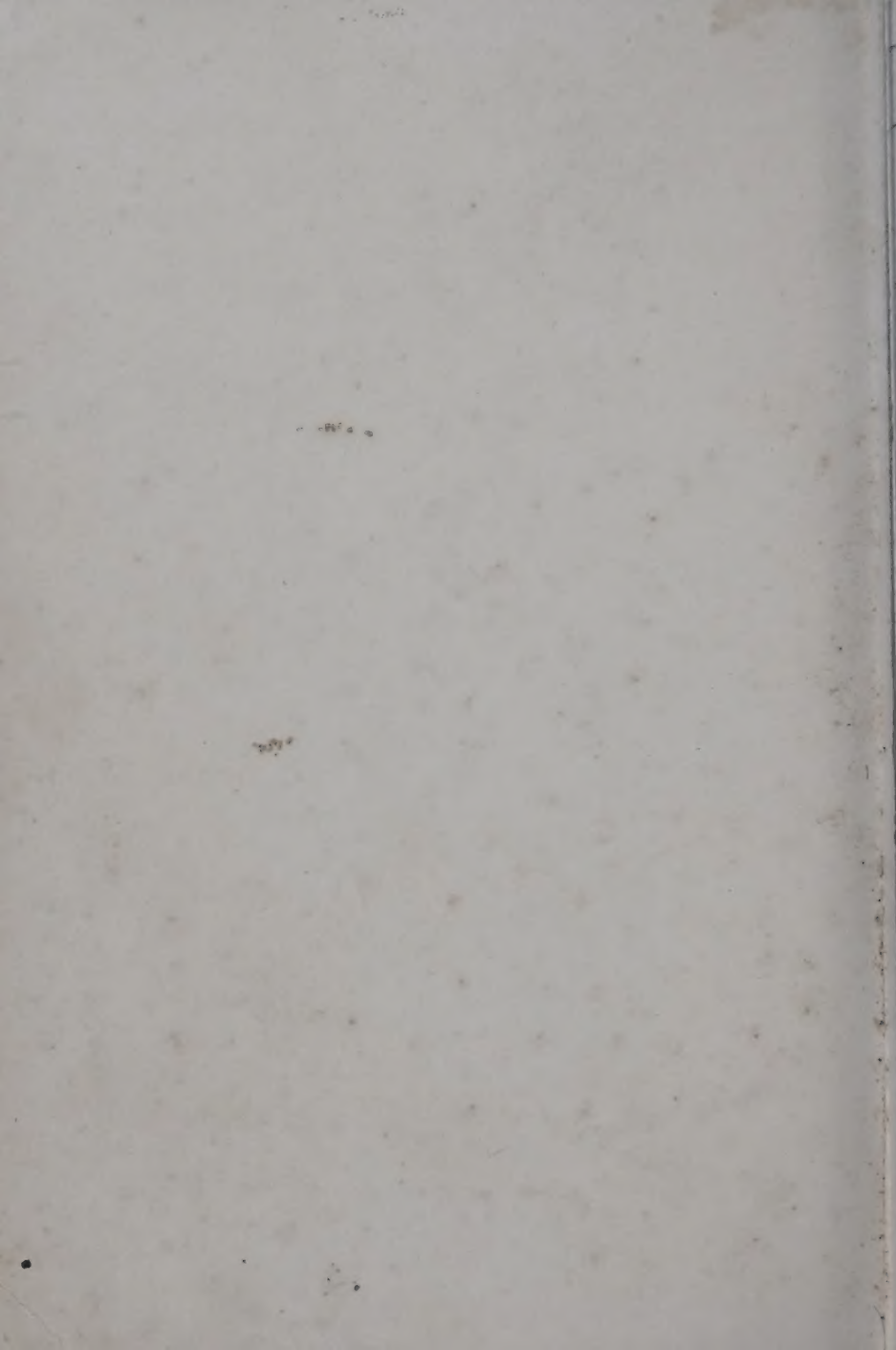
A.S. Guru Raja Rao

A. S. Guru Raja Rao.

Senior Bsc II.

Yuvaraja College
MYSORE.

ಶ್ರೀ	ನಂ.	2412
ಶ್ರೀ	ನಂ.	
ಶ್ರೀ	ನಂ.	17/6/86
ಶ್ರೀ	ನಂ.	



Treasuries of Modern Prose

SIX MODERN
ONE-ACT PLAYS

TREASURIES OF MODERN PROSE

SELECTED BY

H. A. Treble, M.A.

By J. M. BARRIE:

SELECTIONS FROM THE PROSE WORKS

SELECTIONS FROM THE PLAYS

By ERNEST THOMPSON SETON:

KRAG, THE KOOTENAY RAM, and other Anima
Stories.

THE CUTE COYOTE, and other Animal Stories.

By R. AUSTIN FREEMAN:

DR. THORNDYKE INVESTIGATES.

By H. G. WELLS:

SELECTIONS FROM EARLY PROSE WORKS

FROM DAVID COPPERFIELD TO DAVID
BLAIZE, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

MODERN DETECTIVE STORIES, FIRST and
SECOND SERIES, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

MODERN LITERARY ESSAYS, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

MODERN SHORT PLAYS, FIRST, SECOND, and
THIRD SERIES, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

MODERN SHORT STORIES, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

TALES OF THE AIR, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

TALES OF HIDDEN TREASURE, by VARIOUS
WRITERS.

TALES OF PIRATES AND HIGHWAYMEN, by
VARIOUS WRITERS.

TALES OF THE SEA, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

A BOOK OF QUEER STORIES, by VARIOUS WRITERS.

SIX MODERN ONE-ACT PLAYS

BY

J. M. Barrie
Gordon Daviot
T. C. Walker
Sydney Box
Stuart Ready
W. S. Gilbert

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON PRESS LTD.
WARWICK SQUARE, LONDON, E.C.4

FIRST PRINTED . . . 1950

822. 04108
BAR

eg10436

Printed in Great Britain for the UNIVERSITY OF LONDON PRESS LTD.
by ROBERT CUNNINGHAM & SONS LTD, Alva

THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

By J. M. Barrie . *Page 7*

REMEMBER CÆSAR

By Gordon Daviot . . . *Page 37*

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

By T. C. Walker . . . *Page 59*

“BRING ME MY BOW”

By Sydney Box . . . *Page 83*

FIVE AT “THE GEORGE”

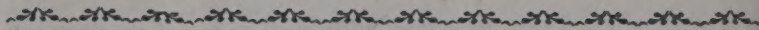
By Stuart Ready . . . *Page 109*

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

By W. S. Gilbert . . . *Page 131*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The thanks of Editor and Publisher are due to the following authors and their publishers for permissions: to the executors of the late Sir J. M. Barrie and Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton for "The Twelve-Pound Look"; to Miss Gordon Daviot and Messrs. Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd. for "Remember Caesar"; to Mr. T. C. Walker and Steele's Play Bureau for "Charles—by the Grace of God . . ."; to Mr. Sydney Box and Messrs. Samuel French Ltd. for "Bring Me My Bow"; to Mr. S. Ready and Steele's Play Bureau for "Five at 'The George'"; and to the executors of the late Sir W. S. Gilbert for "Creatures of Impulse".



SIX MODERN ONE-ACT PLAYS

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

J. M. BARRIE

If quite convenient [as they say about cheques] you are to conceive that the scene is laid in your own house, and that HARRY SIMS is you. Perhaps the ornamentation of the house is a trifle ostentatious, but if you cavil at that we are willing to re-decorate: you don't get out of being HARRY SIMS on a mere matter of plush and dados. It pleases us to make him a city man, but [rather than lose you] he can be turned with a scrape of the pen into a K.C., fashionable doctor, Secretary of State, or what you will. We conceive him of a pleasant rotundity with a thick red neck, but we shall waive that point if you know him to be thin.

It is that day in your career when everything went wrong just when everything seemed to be superlatively right.

In HARRY'S case it was a woman who did the mischief. She came to him in his great hour and told him she did not admire him. Of course he turned her out of the house and was soon himself again, but it spoilt the morning for him. This is the subject of the play, and quite enough too.

HARRY is to receive the honour of knighthood in a few days and we discover him in the sumptuous 'snuggery' of his home in Kensington [or is it Westminster?], rehearsing the ceremony with his wife. They have been at it all the morning, a

The terms for the performance of this play may be obtained from Joan Ling Ltd., Gloucester House, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C. 2, to whom all applications for permission should be made.

pleasing occupation. MRS. SIMS [*as we may call her for the last time, as it were, and strictly as a good-natured joke*] is wearing her presentation gown, and personates the august one who is about to dub her HARRY knight. She is seated regally. Her jewelled shoulders proclaim aloud her husband's generosity. She must be an extraordinarily proud and happy woman, yet she has a drawn face and shrinking ways as if there were some one near her of whom she is afraid. She claps her hands, as the signal to HARRY. He enters bowing, and with a graceful swerve of the leg. He is only partly in costume, the sword and the real stockings not having arrived yet. With a gliding motion that is only delayed while one leg makes up on the other, he reaches his wife, and, going on one knee, raises her hand superbly to his lips. She taps him on the shoulder with a paper-knife and says huskily, 'Rise, Sir Harry.' He rises, bows, and glides about the room, going on his knees to various articles of furniture, and rising from each a knight. It is a radiant domestic scene, and HARRY is as dignified as if he knew that royalty was rehearsing it at the other end.

SIR HARRY [*complacently*]. Did that seem all right, eh?

LADY SIMS [*much relieved*]. I think perfect.

SIR HARRY. But was it dignified?

LADY SIMS. Oh, very. And it will be still more so when you have the sword.

SIR HARRY. The sword will lend it an air. There are really the five moments—[*suining the action to the word*]—the glide—the dip—the kiss—the tap—and you back out a knight. It's short, but it's a very beautiful ceremony. [*Kindly*] Anything you can suggest?

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

LADY SIMS. No—oh no. [*Nervously, seeing him pause to kiss the tassel of a cushion*] You don't think you have practised till you know what to do almost too well?

[*He has been in a blissful temper, but such niggling criticism would try any man.*]

SIR HARRY. I do not. Don't talk nonsense. Wait ~~and~~ till your opinion is asked for.

LADY SIMS [*abashed*]. I'm sorry, Harry. ~~forget~~
[*A perfect butler appears and presents a card.*] 'The Flora Type-Writing Agency.'

SIR HARRY. Ah, yes. I telephoned them to send some one. A woman, I suppose, Tombes?

TOMBES. Yes, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Show her in here. [*He has very lately become a stickler for etiquette.*] And, Tombes, strictly speaking, you know, I am not Sir Harry till Thursday.

TOMBES. Beg pardon, sir, but it is such a satisfaction to us.

SIR HARRY [*good-naturedly*]. Ah, they like it downstairs, do they?

TOMBES [*unbending*]. Especially the females, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Exactly. You can show her in, Tombes. [*The butler departs on his mighty task.*] You can tell the woman what she is wanted for, Emmy, while I change. [*He is too modest to boast about himself, and prefers to keep a wife in the house for that purpose.*] You can tell her the sort of things about me that will

come better from you. [*Smiling happily*] You heard what Tombes said, "Especially the females." And he is right. Success! The women like it even better than the men. And rightly. For they share. *You* share, Lady Sims. Not a woman will see that gown without being sick with envy of it. I know them. Have all our lady friends in to see it. It will make them ill for a week.

[These sentiments carry him off light-heartedly, and presently the disturbing element is shown in. She is a mere typist, dressed in uncommonly good taste, but at contemptibly small expense, and she is carrying her typewriter in a friendly way rather than as a badge of slavery, as of course it is. Her eye is clear; and in odd contrast to LADY SIMS, she is self-reliant and serene.]

KATE [*respectfully, but she should have waited to be spoken to*]. Good morning, madam.

LADY SIMS [*in her nervous way, and scarcely noticing that the typist is a little too ready with her tongue*]. Good morning. [*As a first impression she rather likes the woman, and the woman, though it is scarcely worth mentioning, rather likes her.* LADY SIMS *has a maid for buttoning and unbuttoning her, and probably another for waiting on the maid, and she gazes with a little envy perhaps at a woman who does things for herself.*] Is that the type-writing machine?

KATE [*who is getting it ready for use*]. Yes [*not "Yes madam," as it ought to be*]. I suppose if I am to work here I may take this off. I get on better without it. [*She is referring to her hat.*]

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

LADY SIMS. Certainly. [*But the hat is already off.*] I ought to apologise for my gown. I am to be presented this week, and I was trying it on. [*Her tone is not really apologetic. She is rather clinging to the glory of her gown, wistfully, as if not absolutely certain, you know, that it is a glory.*]

KATE. It is beautiful, if I may presume to say so. [*She frankly admires it. She probably has a best, and a second best of her own: that sort of thing.*]

LADY SIMS [*with a flush of pride in the gown*]. Yes, it is very beautiful. [*The beauty of it gives her courage.*] Sit down, please.

KATE [*the sort of woman who would have sat down in any case*]. I suppose it is some copying you want done? I got no particulars. I was told to come to this address, but that was all.

LADY SIMS [*almost with the humility of a servant*]. Oh, it is not work for me, it is for my husband, and what he needs is not exactly copying. [*Swelling, for she is proud of HARRY.*] He wants a number of letters answered—hundreds of them—letters and telegrams of congratulation.

KATE [*as if it were all in the day's work*]. Yes?

LADY SIMS [*remembering that HARRY expects every wife to do her duty*]. My husband is a remarkable man. He is about to be knighted. [*Pause, but KATE does not fall to the floor.*] He is to be knighted for his services to—[*on reflection*—for his services. [*She is conscious that she is not doing HARRY justice.*] He can explain it so much better than I can.

KATE [*in her business-like way*]. And I am to answer the congratulations?

J. M. BARRIE

LADY SIMS [*afraid that it will be a hard task*]. Yes.

KATE [*blithely*]. It is work I have had some experience of. [*She proceeds to type.*]

LADY SIMS. But you can't begin till you know what he wants to say.

KATE. Only a specimen letter. Won't it be the usual thing?

LADY SIMS [*to whom this is a new idea*]. Is there a usual thing?

KATE. Oh, yes.

[*She continues to type, and LADY SIMS, half-mesmerised, gazes at her nimble fingers. The useless woman watches the useful one, and she sighs, she could not tell why.*]

LADY SIMS. How quickly you do it. It must be delightful to be able to do something, and to do it well.

KATE [*thankfully*]. Yes, it is delightful.

LADY SIMS [*again remembering the source of all her greatness*]. But, excuse me, I don't think that will be any use. My husband wants me to explain to you that his is an exceptional case. He did not try to get this honour in any way. It was a complete surprise to him—.

KATE [*who is a practical Kate and no dealer in sarcasm*]. That is what I have written.

LADY SIMS [*in whom sarcasm would meet a dead wall*]. But how could you know?

KATE. I only guessed.

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

LADY SIMS. Is that the usual thing?

KATE. Oh, yes.

LADY SIMS. They don't try to get it?

KATE. I don't know. That is what we are told to say in the letters.

[To her at present the only important thing about the letters is that they are ten shillings the hundred.]

LADY SIMS *[returning to surer ground]*. I should explain that my husband is not a man who cares for honours. So long as he does his duty——

KATE. Yes, I have been putting that in.

LADY SIMS. Have you? But he particularly wants it to be known that he would have declined a title were it not——

KATE. I have got it here.

LADY SIMS. What have you got?

KATE *[reading]*. "Indeed I would have asked to be allowed to decline had it not been that I want to please my wife."

LADY SIMS *[heavily]*. But how could you know it was that?

KATE. Is it?

LADY SIMS *[who after all is the one with the right to ask questions]*. Do they all accept it for that reason?

KATE. That is what we are told to say in the letters.

LADY SIMS *[thoughtlessly]*. It is quite as if you knew my husband.

J. M. BARRIE

KATE. I assure you, I don't even know his name.

LADY SIMS [*suddenly showing that she knows him*].
Oh, he wouldn't like that.

[*And it is here that HARRY re-enters in his city garments, looking so gay, feeling so jolly that we bleed for him. However, the annoying KATHERINE is to get a shock also.*]

LADY SIMS. This is the lady, Harry.

SIR HARRY [*shooting his cuffs*]. Yes, yes. Good morning, my dear.

[*Then they see each other, and their mouths open, but not for words. After the first surprise KATE seems to find some humour in the situation, but HARRY lowers like a thundercloud.*]

LADY SIMS [*who has seen nothing*]. I have been trying to explain to her——

SIR HARRY. Eh—what? [*He controls himself.*] Leave it to me, Emmy; I'll attend to her.

[*LADY SIMS goes, with a dread fear that somehow she has vexed her lord, and then HARRY attends to the intruder.*]

SIR HARRY [*with concentrated scorn*]. You!

KATE [*as if agreeing with him*]. Yes, it's funny.

SIR HARRY. The shamelessness of your daring to come here.

KATE. Believe me, it is not less a surprise to me than it is to you. I was sent here in the ordinary way of business. I was given only the number of the house. I was not told the name.

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

SIR HARRY [*withering her*]. The ordinary way of business! This is what you have fallen to—a typist!

KATE [*unwithered*]. Think of it.

SIR HARRY. After going through worse straits, I'll be bound.

KATE [*with some grim memories*]. Much worse straits.

SIR HARRY [*alas, laughing coarsely*]. My congratulations.

KATE. Thank you, Harry.

SIR HARRY [*who is annoyed, as any man would be, not to find her abject*]. Eh? What was that you called me, madam?

KATE. Isn't it Harry? On my soul, I almost forget.

SIR HARRY. It isn't Harry to you. My name is Sims, if you please.

KATE. Yes, I had not forgotten that. It was my name, too, you see.

SIR HARRY [*in his best manner*]. It was your name till you forfeited the right to bear it.

KATE. Exactly.

SIR HARRY [*gloating*]. I was furious to find you here, but on second thoughts it pleases me. [*From the depths of his moral nature*] There is a grim justice — in this.

KATE [*sympathetically*]. Tell me?

SIR HARRY. Do you know what you were brought here to do?

J. M. BARRIE

KATE. I have just been learning. You have been made a knight, and I was summoned to answer the messages of congratulation.

SIR HARRY. That's it, that's it. You come on this day as my servant!

KATE. I, who might have been Lady Sims.

SIR HARRY. And you are her typist instead. And she has four men-servants. Oh, I am glad you saw her in her presentation gown.

KATE. I wonder if she would let me do her washing, Sir Harry?

[Her want of taste disgusts him.]

SIR HARRY *[with dignity]*. You can go. The mere thought that only a few flights of stairs separates such as you from my innocent children——

[He will never know why a new light has come into her face.]

KATE *[slowly]*. You have children?

SIR HARRY *[inflated]*. Two.

[He wonders why she is so long in answering.]

KATE *[resorting to impertinence]*. Such a nice number.

SIR HARRY *[with an extra turn of the screw]*. Both boys.

KATE. Successful in everything. Are they like you, Sir Harry?

SIR HARRY *[expanding]*. They are very like me.

KATE. That's nice.

[Even on such a subject as this she can be ribald.]

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

SIR HARRY. Will you please to go?

KATE. Heigho! What shall I say to my employer?

SIR HARRY. That is no affair of mine.

KATE. What will you say to Lady Sims?

SIR HARRY. I flatter myself that whatever I say, Lady Sims will accept without comment. *reading of passage*

[She smiles, heaven knows why, unless her next remark explains it.]

KATE. Still the same Harry.

SIR HARRY. What do you mean? *Central Passage*

KATE. Only that you have the old confidence in your profound knowledge of the sex.

SIR HARRY *[beginning to think as little of her intellect as of her morals]*. I suppose I know my wife.

KATE *[hopelessly dense]*. I suppose so. I was only remembering that you used to think you knew her in the days when I was the lady. *[He is merely wasting his time on her, and he indicates the door. She is not sufficiently the lady to retire worsted.]* Well, good-bye, Sir Harry. Won't you ring, and the four men-servants will show me out?

[But he hesitates.]

SIR HARRY *[in spite of himself]*. As you are here, there is something I want to get out of you. *[Wishing he could ask it less eagerly]* Tell me, who was the man?

[The strange woman—it is evident now that she has always been strange to him—smiles tolerantly.]

KATE. You never found out?

SIR HARRY. I could never be sure.

J. M. BARRIE

KATE [*reflectively*]. I thought that would worry you.

SIR HARRY [*sneering*]. It's plain that he soon left you.

KATE. Very soon.

SIR HARRY. As I could have told you. [*But still she surveys him with the smile of Mona Lisa. The badgered man has to entreat.*] Who was he? It was fourteen years ago, and cannot matter to any of us now. Kate, tell me who he was?

[*It is his first youthful moment, and perhaps because of that she does not wish to hurt him.*]

KATE [*shaking a motherly head*]. Better not ask.

SIR HARRY. I do ask. Tell me.

KATE. It is kinder not to tell you.

SIR HARRY [*violently*]. Then, by James, it was one of my own pals. Was it Bernard Roche? [*She shakes her head.*] It may have been some one who comes to my house still.

KATE. I think not. [*Reflecting*] Fourteen years! You found my letter that night when you went home?

SIR HARRY [*impatient*]. Yes.

KATE. I propped it against the decanters. I thought you would be sure to see it there. It was a room not unlike this, and the furniture was arranged in the same attractive way. How it all comes back to me. Don't you see me, Harry, in hat and cloak, putting the letter there, taking a last look round, and then stealing out into the night to meet——

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

SIR HARRY. Whom?

KATE. Him. Hours pass, no sound in the room but the tick-tack of the clock, and then about midnight you return alone. You take——

SIR HARRY [*gruffly*]. I wasn't alone.

KATE [*the picture spoilt*]. No? oh. [*Plaintively*] Here have I all these years been conceiving it wrongly. [*She studies his face.*] I believe something interesting happened?

SIR HARRY [*growling*]. Something confoundedly annoying.

KATE [*coaxing*]. Do tell me.

SIR HARRY. We won't go into that. Who was the man? Surely a husband has a right to know with whom his wife bolted.

KATE [*who is detestably ready with her tongue*]. Surely the wife has a right to know how he took it. [*The woman's love of bargaining comes to her aid.*] A fair exchange. You tell me what happened, and I will tell you who he was.

SIR HARRY. You will? Very well. [*It is the first point on which they have agreed, and, forgetting himself, he takes a place beside her on the fire-seat. He is thinking only of what he is to tell her, but she, woman-like, is conscious of their proximity.*]

KATE [*tastelessly*]. Quite like old times. [*He moves away from her indignantly.*] Go on, Harry.

SIR HARRY [*who has a manful shrinking from saying anything that is to his disadvantage*]. Well, as you know, I was dining at the club that night.

J. M. BARRIE

KATE. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Jack Lamb drove me home. Mabbett Green was with us, and I asked them to come in for a few minutes.

KATE. Jack Lamb, Mabbett Green? I think I remember them. Jack was in Parliament.

SIR HARRY. No, that was Mabbett. They came into the house with me and—[*with sudden horror*—]—was it him?

KATE [*bewildered*]. Who?

SIR HARRY. Mabbett?

KATE. What?

SIR HARRY. The man?

KATE. What man? [*Understanding*] Oh no. I thought you said he came into the house with you.

SIR HARRY. It might have been a blind.

KATE. Well, it wasn't. Go on.

SIR HARRY. They came in to finish a talk we had been having at the club.

KATE. An interesting talk, evidently.

SIR HARRY. The papers had been full that evening of the elopement of some countess woman with a fiddler. What was her name?

KATE. Does it matter?

SIR HARRY. No. [*Thus ends the countess.*] We had been discussing the thing and—[*he pulls a wry face*]—and I had been rather warm——

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

KATE [*with horrid relish*]. I begin to see. You had been saying it served the husband right, that the man who could not look after his wife deserved to lose her. It was one of your favourite subjects. Oh, Harry, say it was that!

SIR HARRY [*sourly*]. It may have been something like that.

KATE. And all the time the letter was there, waiting; and none of you knew except the clock. Harry, it is sweet of you to tell me. [*His face is not sweet. The illiterate woman has used the wrong adjective.*] I forget what I said precisely in the letter.

SIR HARRY [*pulverising her*]. So do I. But I have it still.

KATE [*not pulverised*]. Do let me see it again. [*She has observed his eye wandering to the desk.*]

SIR HARRY. You are welcome to it as a gift. [*The fateful letter, a poor little dead thing, is brought to light from a locked drawer.*]

KATE [*taking it*]. Yes, this is it. Harry, how you did crumple it! [*She reads, not without curiosity.*] "Dear husband—I call you that for the last time—I am off. I am what you call making a bolt of it. I won't try to excuse myself nor to explain, for you would not accept the excuses nor understand the explanation. It will be a little shock to you, but only to your pride; what will astound you is that any woman could be such a fool as to leave such a man as you. I am taking nothing with me that belongs to you. May you be very happy.—Your ungrateful

J. M. BARRIE

KATE. P.S.—You need not try to find out who he is. You will try, but you won't succeed." [*She folds the nasty little thing up.*] I may really have it for my very own?

SIR HARRY. You really may.

KATE [*impudently*]. If you would care for a typed copy——?

SIR HARRY [*in a voice with which he used to frighten his grandmother*]. None of your sauce. [*Wincing*] I had to let them see it in the end.

KATE. I can picture Jack Lamb eating it.

SIR HARRY. A penniless parson's daughter.

KATE. That is all I was.

SIR HARRY. We searched for the two of you high and low.

KATE. Private detectives?

SIR HARRY. They couldn't get on the track of you.

KATE [*smiling*]. No?

SIR HARRY. But at last the courts let me serve the papers by advertisement on a man unknown, and I got my freedom.

KATE. So I saw. It was the last I heard of you.

SIR HARRY [*each word a blow for her*]. And I married again just as soon as ever I could.

KATE. They say that is always a compliment to the first wife.

SIR HARRY [*violently*]. I showed them.

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

KATE. You soon let them see that if one woman was a fool, you still had the pick of the basket to choose from.

SIR HARRY. By James, I did.

KATE [*bringing him to earth again*]. But still, you wondered who he was.

SIR HARRY. I suspected everybody—even my pals. I felt like jumping at their throats and crying, “It’s you!”

KATE. You had been so admirable to me, an instinct told you that I was sure to choose another of the same.

SIR HARRY. I thought, it can’t be money, so it must be looks. Some dolly face. [*He stares at her in perplexity.*] He must have had something wonderful about him to make you willing to give up all that you had with me.

KATE [*as if he was the stupid one*]. Poor Harry.

SIR HARRY. And it couldn’t have been going on for long, for I would have noticed the change in you.

KATE. Would you?

SIR HARRY. I knew you so well.

KATE. You amazing man.

SIR HARRY. So who was he? Out with it.

KATE. You are determined to know?

SIR HARRY. Your promise. You gave your word.

KATE. If I must—— [*She is the villain of the*

J. M. BARRIE

piece, but it must be conceded that in this matter she is reluctant to pain him.] I am sorry I promised. [*Looking at him steadily.*] There was no one, Harry; no one at all.

SIR HARRY [*rising*]. If you think you can play with me——

KATE. I told you that you wouldn't like it.

SIR HARRY [*rasping*]. It is unbelievable.

KATE. I suppose it is; but it is true.

SIR HARRY. Your letter itself gives you the lie.

KATE. That was intentional. I saw that if the truth were known you might have a difficulty in getting your freedom; and as I was getting mine it seemed fair that you should have yours also. So I wrote my good-bye in words that would be taken to mean what you thought they meant, and I knew the law would back you in your opinion. For the law, like you, Harry, has a profound understanding of women.

SIR HARRY [*trying to straighten himself*]. I don't believe you yet.

KATE [*looking not unkindly into the soul of this man*]. Perhaps that is the best way to take it. It is less unflattering than the truth. But you were the only one. [*Summing up her life.*] You sufficed.

SIR HARRY. Then what mad impulse——

KATE. It was no impulse, Harry. I had thought it out for a year.

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

SIR HARRY. A year? [*dazed*]. One would think to hear you that I hadn't been a good husband to you.

KATE [*with a sad smile*]. You were a good husband according to your lights.

SIR HARRY [*stoutly*]. I think so.

KATE. And a moral man, and chatty, and quite the philanthropist.

SIR HARRY [*on sure ground*]. All women envied you.

KATE. How you loved me to be envied.

SIR HARRY. I swaddled you in luxury.

KATE [*making her great revelation*]. That was it.

SIR HARRY [*blankly*]. What?

KATE [*who can be serene because it is all over*]. How you beamed at me when I sat at the head of your fat dinners in my fat jewellery, surrounded by our fat friends.

SIR HARRY [*aggrieved*]. They weren't so fat.

KATE [*a side issue*]. All except those who were so thin. Have you ever noticed, Harry, that many jewels make women either incredibly fat or incredibly thin?

SIR HARRY [*shouting*]. I have not. [*Is it worth while to argue with her any longer?*] We had all the most interesting society of the day. It wasn't only business men. There were politicians, painters, writers—

KATE. Only the glorious, dazzling successes. Oh, the fat talk while we ate too much—about who had made a hit and who was slipping back, and what

the noo house cost and the noo motor and the gold soup-plates, and who was to be the noo knight.

SIR HARRY [*who it will be observed is unanswerable from first to last*]. Was anybody getting on better than me, and consequently you?

KATE. Consequently me! Oh, Harry, you and your sublime religion.

SIR HARRY [*honest heart*]. My religion? I never was one to talk about religion, but——

KATE. Pooh, Harry, you don't even know what your religion was and is and will be till the day of your expensive funeral. [*And here is the lesson that life has taught her.*] One's religion is whatever he is most interested in, and yours is Success.

SIR HARRY [*quoting from his morning paper*]. Ambition—it is the last infirmity of noble minds.

KATE. Noble minds!

SIR HARRY [*at last grasping what she is talking about*]. You are not saying that you left me because of my success?

KATE. Yes, that was it. [*And now she stands revealed to him.*] I couldn't endure it. If a failure had come now and then—but your success was suffocating me. [*She is rigid with emotion.*] The passionate craving I had to be done with it, to find myself among people who had not got on.

SIR HARRY [*with proper spirit*]. There are plenty of them.

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

KATE. There were none in our set. When they began to go down-hill they rolled out of our sight.

SIR HARRY [*clinchng it*]. I tell you I am worth a quarter of a million.

KATE [*unabashed*]. That is what you are worth to yourself. I'll tell you what you are worth to me: exactly twelve pounds. For I made up my mind that I could launch myself on the world alone if I first proved my mettle by earning twelve pounds; and as soon as I had earned it I left you.

SIR HARRY [*in the scales*]. Twelve pounds!

KATE. That is your value to a woman. If she can't make it she has to stick to you. *Indep*

SIR HARRY [*remembering perhaps a rectory garden*]. You valued me at more than that when you married me.

KATE [*seeing it also*]. Ah, I didn't know you then. If only you had been a man, Harry.

SIR HARRY. A man? What do you mean by a man?

KATE [*leaving the garden*]. Haven't you heard of them? They are something fine; and every woman is loath to admit to herself that her husband is not one. When she marries, even though she has been a very trivial person, there is in her some vague stirring toward a worthy life, as well as a fear of her capacity for evil. She knows her chance lies in him. If there is something good in him, what is good in her finds it, and they join forces against the baser parts. So I didn't give you up willingly, Harry. I

J. M. BARRIE

invented all sorts of theories to explain you. Your hardness—I said it was a fine want of mawkishness. Your coarseness—I said it goes with strength. Your contempt for the weak—I called it virility. Your want of ideals was clear-sightedness. Your ignoble views of women—I tried to think them funny. Oh, I clung to you to save myself. But I had to let go; you had only the one quality, Harry, success; you had it so strong that it swallowed all the others.

SIR HARRY [*not to be diverted from the main issue*]. How did you earn that twelve pounds?

KATE. It took me nearly six months; but I earned it fairly. [*She presses her hand on the typewriter as lovingly as many a woman has pressed a rose.*] I learned this. I hired it and taught myself. I got some work through a friend, and with my first twelve pounds I paid for my machine. Then I considered that I was free to go, and I went.

SIR HARRY. All this going on in my house while you were living in the lap of luxury! [*She nods.*] By God, you were determined.

KATE [*briefly*]. By God, I was.

SIR HARRY [*staring*]. How you must have hated me.

KATE [*smiling at the childish word*]. Not a bit—after I saw that there was a way out. From that hour you amused me, Harry; I was even sorry for you, for I saw that you couldn't help yourself. Success is just a fatal gift.

SIR HARRY. Oh, thank you.

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

KATE [*thinking, dear friends in front, of you and me perhaps*]. Yes, and some of your most successful friends knew it. One or two of them used to look very sad at times, as if they thought they might have come to something if they hadn't got on.

SIR HARRY [*who has a horror of sacrilege*]. The battered crew you live among now—what are they but folk who have tried to succeed and failed?

KATE. That's it; they try, but they fail.

SIR HARRY. And always will fail.

KATE. Always. Poor souls—I say of them. Poor soul—they say of me. It keeps us human. That is why I never tire of them.

SIR HARRY [*comprehensively*]. Bah! Kate, I tell you I'll be worth half a million yet.

KATE. I'm sure you will. You're getting stout, Harry.

SIR HARRY. No, I'm not.

KATE. What was the name of that fat old fellow who used to fall asleep at our dinner-parties?

SIR HARRY. If you mean Sir William Crackley—

KATE. That was the man. Sir William was to me a perfect picture of the grand success. He had got on so well that he was very, very stout, and when he sat on a chair it was thus [*her hands meeting in front of her*]*—*as if he were holding his success together. That is what you are working for, Harry. You will have that and the half million about the same time.

J. M. BARRIE

SIR HARRY [*who has surely been very patient*]. Will you please to leave my house?

KATE [*putting on her gloves, soiled things*]. But don't let us part in anger. How do you think I am looking, Harry, compared to the dull, inert thing that used to roll round in your padded carriages?

SIR HARRY [*in masterly fashion*]. I forget what you were like. I'm very sure you never could have held a candle to the present Lady Sims.

KATE. That is a picture of her, is it not?

SIR HARRY [*seizing his chance again*]. In her wedding-gown. Painted by an R.A.

KATE [*wickedly*]. A knight?

SIR HARRY [*deceived*]. Yes.

KATE [*who likes LADY SIMS: a piece of presumption on her part*]. It is a very pretty face.

SIR HARRY [*with the pride of possession*]. Acknowledged to be a beauty everywhere.

KATE. There is a merry look in the eyes, and character in the chin.

SIR HARRY [*like an auctioneer.*] Noted for her wit.

KATE. All her life before her when that was painted. It is a *spirituelle* face too. [*Suddenly she turns on him with anger, for the first and only time in the play.*] Oh, Harry, you brute!

SIR HARRY [*staggered*]. Eh? What?

KATE. That dear creature capable of becoming a noble wife and mother—she is the spiritless woman

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

of no account that I saw here a few minutes ago. I forgive you for myself, for I escaped, but that poor lost soul, oh, Harry, Harry.

SIR HARRY [*waving her to the door*]. I'll thank you—If ever there was a woman proud of her husband and happy in her married life, that woman is Lady Sims.

KATE. I wonder.

SIR HARRY. Then you needn't wonder.

KATE [*slowly*]. If I was a husband—it is my advice to all of them—I would often watch my wife quietly to see whether the twelve-pound look was not coming into her eyes. Two boys, did you say, and both like you?

SIR HARRY. What is that to you?

KATE [*with glistening eyes*]. I was only thinking that somewhere there are two little girls who, when they grow up—the dear, pretty girls who are all meant for the men that don't get on! Well, good-bye, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY [*showing a little human weakness, it is to be feared*]. Say first that you're sorry.

KATE. For what?

SIR HARRY. That you left me. Say you regret it bitterly. You know you do. [*She smiles and shakes her head. He is pettish. He makes a terrible announcement.*] You have spoilt the day for me.

KATE [*to hearten him*]. I am sorry for that; but it is only a pin-prick, Harry. I suppose it is a little

jarring in the moment of your triumph to find that there is—one old friend—who does not think you a success; but you will soon forget it. Who cares what a typist thinks?

SIR HARRY [*heartened*]. Nobody. A typist at eighteen shillings a week!

KATE [*proudly*]. Not a bit of it, Harry. I double that.

SIR HARRY [*neatly*]. Magnificent!

[*There is a timid knock at the door.*]

LADY SIMS. May I come in?

SIR HARRY [*rather appealingly*]. It is Lady Sims.

KATE. I won't tell. She is afraid to come into her husband's room without knocking!

SIR HARRY. She is not. [*Uxoriously*] Come in, dearest. [*Dearest enters carrying the sword. She might have had the sense not to bring it in while this annoying person is here.*]

LADY SIMS [*thinking she has brought her welcome with her*]. Harry, the sword has come.

SIR HARRY [*who will dote on it presently*]. Oh, all right.

LADY SIMS. But I thought you were so eager to practise with it.

[*The person smiles at this. He wishes he had not looked to see if she was smiling.*]

SIR HARRY [*sharply*]. Put it down.

[*LADY SIMS flushes a little as she lays the sword aside.*]

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

KATE [*with her confounded courtesy*]. It is a beautiful sword, if I may say so.

LADY SIMS [*helped*]. Yes.

[*The person thinks she can put him in the wrong, does she? He'll show her.*]

SIR HARRY [*with one eye on KATE*]. Emmy, the one thing your neck needs is more jewels.

LADY SIMS [*faltering*]. More!

SIR HARRY. Some ropes of pearls. I'll see to it. It's a bagatelle to me. [KATE *conceals her chagrin, so she had better be shown the door. He rings.*] I won't detain you any longer, miss.

KATE. Thank you.

LADY SIMS. Going already? You have been very quick.

SIR HARRY. The person doesn't suit, Emmy.

LADY SIMS. I'm sorry.

KATE. So am I, madam, but it can't be helped. Good-bye, your ladyship—good-bye, Sir Harry. [*There is a suspicion of an impertinent curtsy, and she is escorted off the premises by TOMBES. The air of the room is purified by her going. SIR HARRY notices it at once.*]

LADY SIMS [*whose tendency is to say the wrong thing*]. She seemed such a capable woman.

SIR HARRY [*on his hearth*]. I don't like her style at all.

LADY SIMS [*meekly*]. Of course you know best. [*This is the right kind of woman.*]

SIR HARRY [*rather anxious for corroboration*]. Lord, how she winced when I said I was to give you those ropes of pearls.

LADY SIMS. Did she? I didn't notice. I suppose so.

SIR HARRY [*frowning*]. Suppose? Surely I know enough about women to know that.

LADY SIMS. Yes, oh yes.

SIR HARRY. [*Odd that so confident a man should ask this.*] Emmy, I know you well, don't I? I can read you like a book, eh?

LADY SIMS [*nervously*]. Yes, Harry.

SIR HARRY [*jovially, but with an inquiring eye*]. What a different existence yours is from that poor lonely wretch's.

LADY SIMS. Yes, but she has a very contented face.

SIR HARRY [*with a stamp of his foot*]. All put on. What?

LADY SIMS [*timidly*]. I didn't say anything.

SIR HARRY [*snapping*]. One would think you envied her.

LADY SIMS. Envied? Oh no—but I thought she looked so alive. It was while she was working the machine.

SIR HARRY. Alive! That's no life. It is you that are alive. [*Curtly*] I'm busy, Emmy. [*He sits at his writing-table.*]

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

LADY SIMS [*dutifully*]. I'm sorry; I'll go, Harry.
[*Inconsequentially*] Are they very expensive?

SIR HARRY. What?

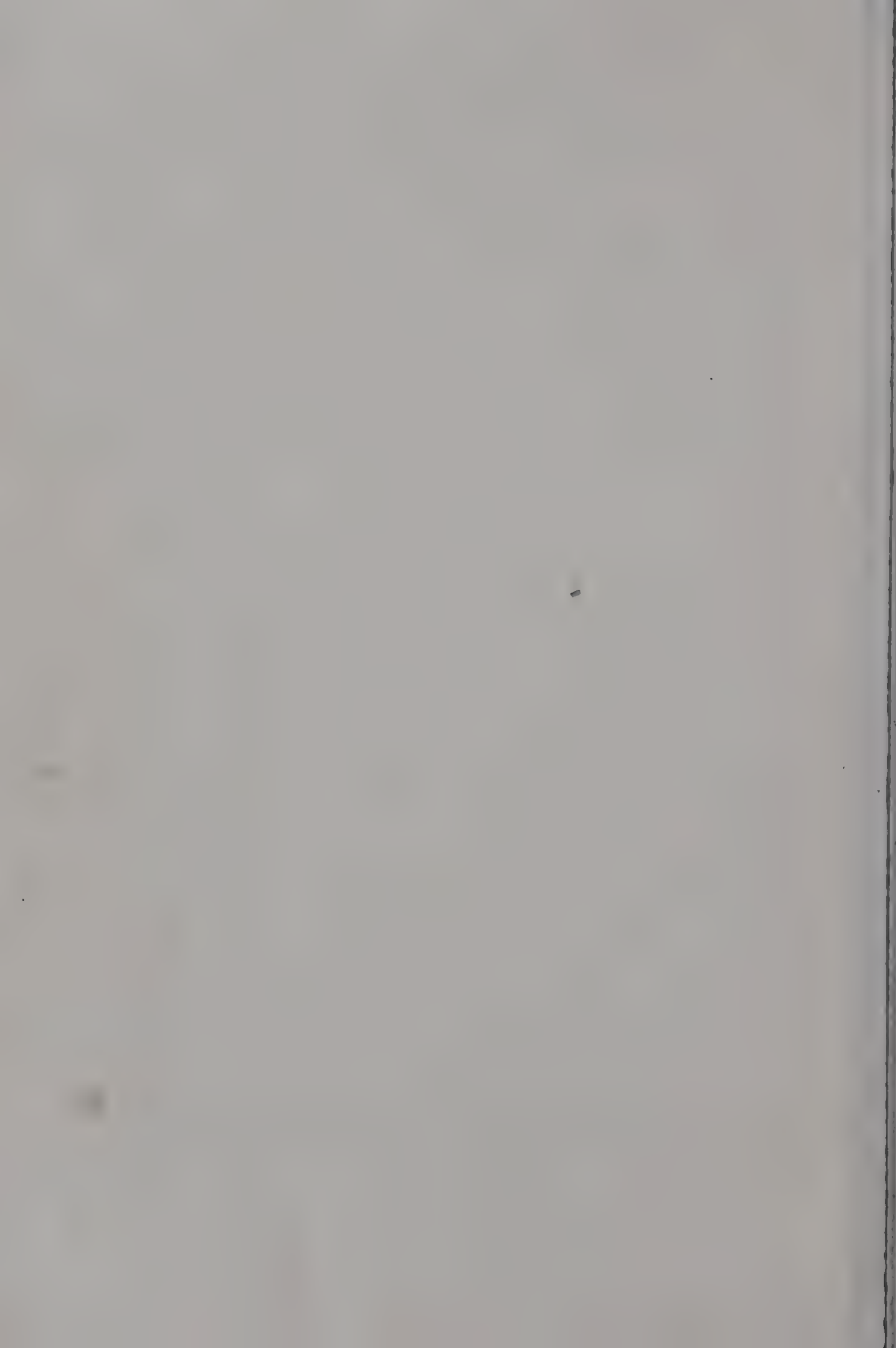
LADY SIMS. Those machines?

[*When she has gone the possible meaning of her question startles him. The curtain hides him from us, but we may be sure that he will soon be bland again. We have a comfortable feeling, you and I, that there is nothing of HARRY SIMS in us.*]

*then suggest
that a wife is kinder to
go.
the possible meaning*

*conclusion
Victim*

*self-
satisf-
action*



REMEMBER CÆSAR

GORDON DAVIOT

CHARACTERS

In order of appearance

LORD WESTON

ROGER CHETWYND

LADY WESTON

SCENE: *A room in the house of RICHARD, LORD WESTON, on a spring morning in the reign of Charles II. LORD WESTON [until his late elevation to the bench, Sir Richard] is not wealthy, and the room is a combination of study and withdrawing-room. Up right is the door to the landing [it is a first-floor room], in the rear wall a large casement window looking out to the front of the house, in the left wall the fireplace and, down, another window through which one can see the trees in the garden. Up from the fireplace a cupboard in the wall. Hanging on the walls and over the fireplace are family portraits.*

LORD WESTON *is seated by the fireplace, a table of books and papers beside him. He is engaged in filling his pipe. And talking.*

Down right, where the light from the side window falls across his small writing-table, is seated MR. ROGER CHET-

The terms for the performance of this play may be obtained from A. M. Heath, Princes House, Jermyn Street, London, S.W.1, to whom all applications for permission should be made.

WYND, *a thin, earnest, absent-minded, and conscientious youth. So conscientious is he that his mind, even when absent, is absent on his employer's business. He has begun by listening to his master's lecture, but the lure of his work has been gradually too much for him, and he is now blissfully copying from one paper on to another while the measured words flow over him, his lips forming the phrases while he writes.*

WESTON. —And furthermore [*he pauses to arrange the tobacco*] it is not alone a question of duty; there is your own success in the world to be considered. It is not your intention to be a secretary all your life, is it? No. Very well. Diligence, and a respect for detail should be your care. I did not become Lord Weston by twiddling my thumbs and hoping for favours. I won my honours by hard work and zealous service. Men who were at Corpus Christi with me are to-day copying documents for a living, while I—let us not mince matters—am the best-known, and certainly the most impartial, judge in England, and a favoured servant of his gracious majesty, Charles the Second. That, I submit, my good Roger, is an example to be studied. It is not only unbecoming in you to ask for a half-holiday, but it is greatly unlike you. I fear . . . [*He has turned towards his secretary, and discovers his misplaced diligence. After a pause, coldly*] Can it be, Mr. Chetwynd, that you have not been listening to my discourse?

ROGER [*brought to the surface by the cessation of the word music*]. What, my lord? Oh, no. Yes, certainly, sir, I am listening.

WESTON. What was I talking of?

REMEMBER CÆSAR

ROGER. Yourself, sir. [*amending*] I mean, of your rise to success, my lord. [*It is apparent that it is an oft-heard tale.*]

WESTON. We were talking of your extraordinary request for a half-holiday, when you had one only last month. On that occasion, if I remember well, your parents came to town and you must needs go gadding. Would it be straining courtesy too far if I were to inquire what prompts this new demand for heedless leisure?

ROGER. I thought perhaps if you did not need me this afternoon, my lord, I might personally interview the clerk of the Awards Committee, and find out why he has not sent that document.

WESTON [*a little taken aback*]. Oh. Oh, indeed.

ROGER. The lack of it greatly hinders. It holds up my work, you see. And at this most interesting point . . . [*His glance goes longingly to his desk.*]

WESTON. That, of course, is a different matter. I see no reason [*he looks for a spill for his pipe, first on the table and then, rising, by the fire*] why you should not take a walk to Mr. Clay's in the afternoon if the weather is fine. I am relieved that your thoughts are on sober matters, as befits a rising young man. Diligence, courage, and attention to detail: these are the three . . . Where are the spills? These are what bring a man to success and endow him with dignity . . . No tapers and no spills, as usual! [*Looking on the table for a scrap of paper and finally feeling in his pockets*] Without an orderly mind no man can hope [ROGER *has gone back to his work*] to excel in any of the learned

professions. [*He has found a scrap of paper, rather crushed, in his pocket and smooths it out, uninterestedly, to make a rough spill.*] Detail, my good Roger, attention to detail. That is the beginning of greatness. That is the . . . [*reading automatically and with some difficulty what is written on the scrap of paper*] "Remember Cæsar." [*Repeating, with vague interest*] "Remember Cæsar." [*He turns the paper back and forth, at a loss. And then a new idea occurs to him, a rather horrible idea.* To ROGER] What is the date to-day? [*As ROGER, buried again in his work, does not answer*] Roger! I said, what day of the month is it?

ROGER. [*Hardly pausing*] It is the fifteenth, my lord.

WESTON. The fifteenth! The fifteenth of March. The Ides of March! [*Looking at the paper again; in a horrified whisper*] "Remember Cæsar"! [*Louder*] So they want to kill me, do they? They want to kill me? [*ROGER comes to the surface, surprised.*] That is what it is to be a judge over men [*all his pompousness is dissolving in agitation*], an instrument of justice. Sooner or later revenge lies await in the by-ways. And the juster a judge has been, the more fearless [*he waves the paper in the astonished ROGER's face*], so much greater will be the hate that pursues——

ROGER. What is it, my lord? What is it?

WESTON. My death warrant if I am not careful. What cases have we had lately? The treason affair—I refused to be bribed! [*The boast gives him a passing comfort.*] The piracy—both sides hate me for that. Or there was that footpad——

ROGER. Is it a threat, the paper? Where did it come from?

REMEMBER CÆSAR

WESTON. It was in my pocket. Someone must have . . . Yes, now I remember. A man brushed against me yesterday as I was leaving the courts. A small, evil-looking fellow, very sly.

ROGER. What does it say, the paper?

WESTON [*much too occupied with his own fate to attend to his secretary's curiosity*]. Just at the door, it was, and he didn't wait for apology. I remember. Well, I can only thank them for the warning. I may die before my time but it will not be to-day if I can help it. Go downstairs at once, Roger, and lock and bar all the doors. Lock, bar, and chain them. And ask my wife to come to me at once. At once. Stop! Are there any strangers in the house? Workmen or such?

ROGER. Only Joel the gardener, my lord; he is cleaning the windows on the landing. [*He indicates with his head that Joel is just outside.*]

WESTON. Send him away at once. Tell him to leave everything and go, and lock the door behind him. And the windows—see that the windows, too, are closed.

[*ROGER goes with speed. One can hear him begin his order to Joel before he shuts the door: Joel, his lordship says that you must . . . and the whistling which has become audible through the opened door dies away. WESTON, left alone, peers cautiously from each window in turn. Then his mind, temporarily relieved, goes to the cupboard and is greatly exercised again. He stares at it fearfully for a moment or two, and then puts his fear to the test. He takes a pistol from the drawer of his desk.*]

GORDON DAVIOT

WESTON [*facing the cupboard with levelled pistol*]. Come out! Come out, I say. [*There is silence.*] Drop your weapon and come out or I shall shoot you now. [*As there is still silence he forces himself to close in on the cupboard door, and standing to the side pulls it quickly open. It is empty. As soon as his relief abates he is ashamed, and hastily returns the pistol to its drawer.*]

[*Enter, bright and purposeful, LADY WESTON. A charming creature. One knows at a glance that she is an excellent housewife, but to the last one is never sure how much intelligence and sweet malice there lies behind her practical simplicity.*]

LADY WESTON [*looking back as she comes in*]. I do wish that Joel wouldn't leave pails of water on the landing! What is it, Richard? It's baking morning.

WESTON [*going to her and taking her hand in his reassuringly*]. My dear, don't be alarmed——

LADY WESTON. I'm not. But the surest way to make me is to pat my hand and tell me not to be.

WESTON. My dear, your husband's life is in grave danger.

LADY WESTON. The last time it was in danger you had been eating game pie. What is it this time?

WESTON [*annihilating her flippancy with one broadside*]. Assassination!

LADY WESTON. Well, well! You always wanted to be a great man and now you have got your wish!

WESTON. What do you mean?

LADY WESTON. They don't assassinate nobodies.

REMEMBER CÆSAR

WESTON [*showing her the paper*]. Read that, and see if you can laugh.

LADY WESTON. I'm not laughing. [*Trying to read the writing*]. What a dreadful scrawl.

WESTON. Yes, the venomous scribbling of an illiterate.

LADY WESTON [*deciphering*]. "Remember Cæsar." Is it a riddle?

WESTON. It is a death warrant. Do you know what day this is?

LADY WESTON. Thursday.

WESTON. What day of the month?

LADY WESTON. About the twelfth, I should guess.

WESTON [*with meaning*]. It is the fifteenth. The fifteenth of March.

LADY WESTON. Lawdamussy! Your good-sister's birthday! And we haven't sent her as much as a lily!

WESTON. I have deplored before, Frances, the incurable lightness of your mind. On the fifteenth of March Cæsar was murdered in the Forum.

LADY WESTON. Yes, of course, I remember. They couldn't stand his airs any longer.

WESTON [*reproving*]. He was a great man.

LADY WESTON [*kindly*]. Yes, my dear, I am sure he was. [*Looking again at the scrap of paper*] And is someone thinking of murdering you?

WESTON. Obviously.

GORDON DAVIOT

LADY WESTON. I wonder someone hasn't done it long ago. [*Before the look of wonder can grow in his eye*] A great many people must hate judges. And you are a strict judge, they say.

WESTON. It is the law that is strict. I am a judge, my good Frances, not a juggler. I have never twisted the law to please the mob, and I shall not please them by dying on the day of their choice.

LADY WESTON. No, of course not. You shall not go out of the house to-day. A nice light dinner and a good glass of——

WESTON. I have sent Roger to barricade all the doors, and I think it would be wise to close the ground-floor shutters and see that they are not opened for any——

LADY WESTON. Is it the French and the Dutch together you are expecting! And this is the morning Mr. Gammon's boy comes with the groceries. How am I to——

WESTON. My dear, is a little pepper more to you than your husband's life?

LADY WESTON. It isn't a little pepper, it's a great deal of flour. And you would be the first to complain if the bread were short, or the gravy thin. [*Giving him back the paper*] How do you know that the little paper was meant for you?

WESTON. Because it was in my pocket. I found it there when I was looking for something to light my pipe. [*With meaning*] There were no spills.

LADY WESTON. No spills. What, again? Richard, you smoke far too much.

REMEMBER CÆSAR

WESTON [*continuing hastily*]. It was slipped into my pocket by a man who brushed against me yesterday. A dark, lean fellow with an evil face.

LADY WESTON. I don't think he was very evil.

WESTON. What do you know about it?

LADY WESTON. It was kind of him to warn you. And wasn't it a mercy that the spills were finished and that no one had made any more! If there had been even one there you would never have seen the paper. You would have gone for your noon walk down the Strand and someone would have stuck you like a goose on a spit, and I should have been a widow before dinner-time——

WESTON [*sinking into a chair*]. Stop, Frances, stop! It upsets me to——

[*Enter ROGER, a little out of breath after his flying tour round the house.*]

WESTON. Ah, Roger. Have you seen to it all? Every door barred, every window shut, all workmen out——

ROGER [*a little embarrassed*]. Every door except the kitchen one, my lord.

WESTON [*angry*]. And why not the kitchen one?

ROGER [*stammering*]. The cook seemed to think . . . That is, she said . . .

WESTON. Well, speak, man, what did she say, and how does what the cook thinks affect my order to bar the kitchen door?

ROGER [*in a rush*]. The cook said she was a respect-

GORDON DAVIOT

able woman and had never been behind bars in her life and she wasn't going to begin at her age, and she was quite capable of dealing with anyone who came to the kitchen door——

LADY WESTON. Never mind, Roger, I shall speak to cook——

WESTON [*interrupting her, furious*]. Is the woman mad? Did you tell her that her master might be killed in her very presence if the door were not——

ROGER. I did, my lord, I did. She said there would be a killing there and then if I did not leave her kitchen. She is a very formidable woman, my lord, and there was the matter of a rolling-pin . . . I thought it best to desist.

LADY WESTON. Be calm, Richard. It is only that the cook's temper is apt to be uncertain in the morning. I know how to coax her into a better humour——

WESTON. Coax! Since when have my servants to be coaxed! She shall leave my house this very hour.

LADY WESTON. Oh, nonsense, Richard! All cooks are strange tempered. It comes from standing over hot stoves and breathing in pepper. I shall see——

WESTON. This very hour. If her silly mind is so careless of her master's safety she has no right to his roof. Tell her to pack her things and leave the house at once, and see that the door is barred after her.

LADY WESTON. And who will cook your pet dishes when I go to stay with Sibylla? Be calm, Richard. The kitchen door will be locked, and cook will see to the barring of it herself, and be proud of her handi-

REMEMBER CÆSAR

work, I promise you. That is what a mistress is for, to sweep up after the master. I shall also see that all the downstairs windows are shuttered as you suggest. We can always haul the groceries through an upper window. That will be entertaining for poor old Lady Gascoigne, anyhow; glooming there in her window. She has had no amusement out of this street since the dog-fight on Ash Wednesday. [*As she is going, pausing*] Would you like me to block up the chimneys, perhaps?

WESTON [*controlling himself*]. I think that so frivolous a suggestion at so anxious a time is in poor taste, Frances, and unworthy of you——

LADY WESTON. Did it appear frivolous to you? How strange! I had thought it odd to shutter the walls and yet leave openings in the roof that one could drive a coach and horses through. However! [*She comes back into the room, takes two candelabra from different places in the room, and goes to the door.*]

WESTON. What do you want with these?

LADY WESTON. If we are to be in darkness below we shall want all the candles we can gather. [*Exit.*]

WESTON. The aptness of the female mind to busy itself about irrelevant and inconsiderable minutiae is a source of endless wonder to me. [*Almost without noticing what he is doing he moves over to the fireplace and sticks his head into the chimney to view the width of it. As he withdraws it, he becomes aware of ROGER, standing watching.*] I see no reason now why you should not resume your work, Roger.

ROGER. Oh, my lord, it is beyond my power to

GORDON DAVIOT

work while you are in danger. Is there not something I could do?

WESTON [*mightily flattered*]. Nonsense, my good Roger, nonsense! Nothing is going to happen to me.

ROGER. I could perhaps go and warn the authorities, and so prevent——

WESTON [*very brave*]. No, no, no. Am I to spend the rest of my life with a guard at my heels? A pretty figure I should cut! Go on with your work and . . . [*his eye has lighted on a package which is lying on a chair against the right wall. The box is oblong—roughly 18 in. by 10 in. by 4 in.—and tied with cord. Sharply*] What is this?

ROGER. That came for you this morning, sir.

WESTON. What is it?

ROGER [*with the faint beginnings of doubt in his voice*]. I don't know, my lord. A man came with it and said that it was important that you should have it to-day.

WESTON. And you didn't ask what it was! You fool!

ROGER [*humbly*]. It didn't seem to be my business. I never do ask about the contents of your lordship's . . . I showed your lordship the package when it came, and you said to leave it there.

WESTON [*peering with growing uneasiness at the thing*]. The man who brought it, what did he look like? Was he small? Dark?

ROGER [*who obviously had taken no notice*]. I think he was smallish. But as to dark—his hat was pulled

REMEMBER CÆSAR

over his face. I think—I think he appeared to have a mole on his chin, but I would not . . . It may have been just a——

WESTON. A mole? [*his imagination at work*] A mole! Yes. Yes. That man had a mole. The man who brushed against me. On the right side of his jaw. I can see it as if he were standing here. We must get rid of this. At once.

ROGER. Do you think it is some infernal machine, sir? What shall we do with it?

WESTON [*indicating the side window*]. Open the window and I shall throw it as far into the garden as I can.

ROGER. But it may explode, sir, if we throw it.

WESTON. What is certain is that it will explode if we do not! How long has it been lying here?

ROGER. It came about nine o'clock, my lord.

WESTON [*in an agony*]. Nearly three hours ago! Open the window, Roger.

ROGER. No, sir. You open the window. Let me handle the thing. My life is nothing. Yours is of great value to England.

WESTON. No, Roger, no. You are young. I have had my life. There are still great things for you to do in the world. You must live, and write my life for posterity. Do as I say. I promise you I shall exercise the greatest care. [*As ROGER rushes to the window*] No. Wait! A better idea. The gardener's pail. It is still on the landing!

ROGER. Yes! Yes, of course! [*He is out of the*

GORDON DAVIOT

room and back in a moment with the wooden pail of water, which still has the wet cleaning rag hung over its edge.]

WESTON. Stand back. [*He picks up the parcel gingerly.*] We do not know what satanic thing may happen. [*He inserts the parcel lengthwise into the pail, at full stretch of his arm, his head averted, his eyes watching from their extreme corners*] There is not enough water! Not enough to cover it.

ROGER. I'll get some. I shall not be a moment.

WESTON. No. Don't go. The flowers! [*He indicates a bowl of daffodils.*]

ROGER. Of course! [*He pulls the daffodils from their setting, throwing them on the desk in his agitation, and pours the water into the pail.*] Ah! That has done it!

WESTON [*dismayed, as he takes his hand from the package*]. Now it is going to float! It must be wet through, or it is no use.

ROGER. We must put something heavy on top, to keep it down.

WESTON. Yes, yes, Get something.

ROGER. What shall I get?

WESTON. Good God, boy! Have you no ideas once the pen is out of your hand? Anything, anything that is heavy and that will fit into the pail. Books, anything!

ROGER [*to whom books are objects of reverence, if not awe*]. Books, sir? But they'll get very wet, won't they?

WESTON. In the name of heaven bring the first six books off the shelf!

REMEMBER CÆSAR

ROGER [*snatching the books and bringing them*]. I suppose it cannot be helped. Such beautiful bindings too! [*He picks the wet cloth off the edge of the pail, dropping it on the carpet, and plunges the books into the water, which very naturally overflows at this new incursion.*]

WESTON [*letting go his hold on the package and sitting back on his heels with a sigh of relief*]. Ah! Well and truly drowned. [*He mops his forehead and ROGER collapses into the nearest chair.*]

[*Enter LADY WESTON, with a tray on which is a glass of wine and some biscuits.*]

LADY WESTON [*seeing their strange occupation*]. Lawd-amussy, Richard! What have you got in the pail?

WESTON. A package that came this morning. The man who brought it was the same fellow that knocked against me yesterday and slipped that paper into my pocket. They thought I would open it, the fools! [*He is beginning to feel better.*] But we have been one too many for them!

LADY WESTON [*in wild dismay*]. But how stupid! You are just making a mess of the beautiful, brand-new——

WESTON [*interrupting her angrily*]. Frances! [*The thunder of her name quenches her speech.*] What does your “beautiful brand-new” carpet matter when your husband’s life is at stake? You shock me.

LADY WESTON [*who has not been going to say “carpet”*]. Carpet? [*After a pause, mildly*] No, of course not, my dear. I should never dream of weighing your safety against even the finest product of Asia. Come and sit down and have a glass of wine. [*She puts the*

GORDON DAVIOT

tray on his desk, gathering up the scattered daffodils as she does so] You know how the doctor disapproves of excitement for you.

WESTON. Perhaps the doctor has never had an infernal machine handed in at his door of a spring morning.

[LADY WESTON *picks up the cloth from the floor, mops the spilt water, and pauses to look curiously at the contents of the pail as they catch her eye.*]

ROGER [*who has been staring at the pail in absorbed fascination*]. I am afraid we have made a little mess. Please let me do that.

LADY WESTON [*in mild conversational tones*]. That looks like Mr. Spencer in the water.

ROGER. Yes, it is. The thing floated, you see. And time was all-important. So it was imperative to take whatever was nearest to weight it down.

LADY WESTON. I see. [*Handing him the wet cloth, and the flowers*] Would you be kind enough to take these downstairs? [*She adds the empty flower-bowl to his load*] One of the maids will fill that for you.

[ROGER *goes.*]

WESTON. Have the kitchen wenches decided that the door of their domain may at last be bolted?

LADY WESTON. Oh, they are all very happy. Cook thinks she knows how to make bullets by dropping hot lead into cold water, or something of the sort. And the kitchenmaid thinks that she will stay in London after all.

WESTON. Stay in London?

REMEMBER CÆSAR

LADY WESTON [*indicating his tray; he is already sipping the wine*]. Try the biscuits. They are Sibylla's recipe. Yes, she was leaving because she found London so quiet after the country.

WESTON [*through his biscuit*]. Ridiculous!

LADY WESTON. In the country, she said, if there wasn't a calving there was a wedding, and if there wasn't a wedding there was a wake. It was never dull. A pleasant girl. I am glad London is being livelier for her.

WESTON. My household seem to treat my danger as a sort of raree-show.

LADY WESTON. No, dear, no. All maids like a little to-do. It makes life important for them.

WESTON. A little to-do! My funeral, I hope will be even more exciting for them. You must have a wake to please the kitchen-maid.

LADY WESTON [*not listening to him; contemplative, her eyes on the portrait which hangs opposite the side window*]. Do you think we had better remove Great-aunt Cicely?

WESTON. In the name of heaven, why?

LADY WESTON. She is in the direct line of shots coming through that window.

WESTON. And why should any shots come through the window, may I ask?

LADY WESTON [*mildly objecting to the tone*]. I was merely taking thought for your property, my dear Richard. And anyone sitting in the ilex tree out there would be in a——

GORDON DAVIOT

WESTON [*on his feet*]. Frances! What made you think of the ilex tree?

LADY WESTON. That is where I would shoot you from. I mean, if I were going to shoot you. The leaves are thick enough to hide anyone sitting there, and yet not enough to obscure their view.

WESTON. Come away from that window.

LADY WESTON. What?

WESTON. Come away from that window!

LADY WESTON [*moving to him*]. No one is going to shoot *me*.

WESTON [*running out of the room, and calling to ROGER from the landing*]. Roger! Roger!

ROGER [*very distant*]. My lord?

WESTON. Has the gardener gone away yet?

ROGER. No, my lord. He is eating his dinner outside the kitchen window.

WESTON. Tell him to sit under the ilex tree until I give him leave to move.

ROGER. The ilex tree? Yes, my lord.

[WESTON *comes back and goes to the drawer of the table where his pistol is kept.*]

LADY WESTON [*as he takes out the pistol*]. Oh, Richard, dear, be careful. That is a very dangerous weapon.

WESTON [*grimly important*]. I know it!

LADY WESTON. It is so rusty that it is liable to do anything. [*As her husband proceeds to load the weapon*] You know that you haven't used it since you were

REMEMBER CÆSAR

shooting dancing balls off the fountain. That was the year after we were married. The butcher's son blew half his scalp off the other week, trying to fire a rusty pistol. He has no hair left except a few red tufts over the right ear. His father says the only hope for him is to become a gentleman so that he can wear a wig.

WESTON. There is nothing wrong with my pistol but a little dust.

LADY WESTON. Well, I think it is a poor way to foil an assassin.

WESTON. What is?

LADY WESTON. Blowing oneself up.

[*Enter ROGER with the bowl of daffodils.*]

WESTON [*looking round at him as he comes in*]. Has Joel gone to sit under the tree?

ROGER. Yes, sir. [*Putting down the bowl and making for the side window*] At least, I gave him your message.

WESTON. Keep away from that window! [*As ROGER looks astonished*] There may be someone in the ilex tree.

ROGER. But do you think they would try to shoot you as well as—as . . . [*he indicates the bucket*].

WESTON. Who knows? When you have dealt with the criminal mind as long as I have . . . Did you open the door to speak to the gardener?

ROGER. Oh, no, my lord. I spoke through the shutter. The cook is of the opinion that we should send for the military.

GORDON DAVIOT

LADY WESTON. Cook is always of opinion that we should send for the military.

WESTON [*snapping the lock of his pistol*]. Now we shall see whether there is anyone lurking in the tree. [*He moves over to the side of the window, peering out with the fraction of an eye.*]

LADY WESTON. Richard, if you are going to shoot off that thing, you will please wait until I——

[*She is interrupted by a loud knocking on the front door downstairs. This is such an unexpected development that all three are momentarily quite still, at a loss. ROGER is the first to recover.*]

ROGER. Someone at the front door.

[*He moves over to the window in the rear wall, from which one can see the street. He is about to open the casement so that he may lean out to inspect the knocker, when LORD WESTON stops him.*]

WESTON [*still at the fireplace*]. Don't open that window!

ROGER. But I cannot see otherwise, my lord, who it is.

WESTON. If you put your head out of that window they may shoot without waiting to ask questions.

LADY WESTON. But, Richard, it may be some perfectly innocent visitor.

[*The knocking is repeated.*]

ROGER. If I were to stand on a chair. . . . [*He brings a chair to the window and stands on it, but he is still not high enough to look down on whoever waits at the front door.*]

WESTON. Well? Well? Can you tell who it is?

REMEMBER CÆSAR

ROGER. I am still not high enough, my lord.

LADY WESTON. Add the footstool, Roger.

[ROGER *adds the footstool to the chair, and aided by*

LADY WESTON *climbs on to the precarious erection.*]

LADY WESTON. Now, can you see anyone?

ROGER [*having seen, scrambling down*]. All is well, my lord. [*He throws open the casement, and calls to someone below*] In a moment, my good sir, in a moment! All is well, my lord, It is only Mr. Cæsar. [*As this information is succeeded by a blank pause*] Shall I let him in?

WESTON. Who did you say?

ROGER. Mr. Cæsar. You remember: the man you met on Tuesday at Hampton, my lord. He was to come to see you this morning about rose trees. You made a note of it.

WESTON [*taking the crumpled piece of paper from his pocket in a dazed way*] I made a note? "Remember Cæsar." Is that my writing? Yes, it must be. Dear me!

LADY WESTON [*kindly*]. I shouldn't have said it was the venomous scribbling of an illiterate. You had better go down and let Mr. Cæsar in, Roger. Put the pistol away, Richard, dear; your visitor might misunderstand it. [*She speaks cheerfully, as to a child; it is obvious from her lack of surprise that excursions and alarms created by her husband over trifles are a normal part of existence for her.*] And if you take Mr. Spencer out of the water, I shall send Joel to take away the bucket. Perhaps Mr. Brutus would like some cordial?

WESTON. Mr. Cæsar. [*He moves towards the bucket.*]

GORDON DAVIOT

LADY WESTON. Of course. How could anyone forget a name like that? And now, if you'll forgive me. . . . It's my busy morning.

WESTON [*arresting her as she is going out of the door*]. Oh Frances! What was in the parcel, do you think?

LADY WESTON. That was your new velvet cloak, dear. I did try to tell you, you know. [*Exit.*]

[*The curtain comes down on LORD WESTON ruefully taking the first dripping book from the water.*]

CURTAIN

“CHARLES—
BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . . ”

T. C. WALKER

CHARACTERS

THE LANDLORD OF THE GEORGE INN.

HIS DAUGHTER NELL.

KING CHARLES THE SECOND.

LADY JULIANA CONINGSBY.

LORD HARRY WILMOT.

A CROMWELLIAN SOLDIER.

It is a fine evening in September 1651.

SCENE: *The upper room of the “George Inn,” Bridport. The furniture is rough and heavy, the room is heavily panelled in oak. Through a leaded window in the right wall the setting sun throws criss-cross patterns on the floor. There is a bench beneath the window.*

In the back wall is a fireplace; L., a door to the stairs, R., an opening to a darkened passage.

The curtain rises on the LANDLORD and his daughter, NELL. The LANDLORD is a shifty fox of a man. NELL is a charming country girl of twenty.

The LANDLORD is diving into the contents of a valise

The terms for the performance of this play may be obtained from Steale's Play Bureau, 32 Haymarket, London, S.W.1, to whom all applications for permission should be made.

which is lying on a table, L.C. NELL is kneeling by the fireplace brushing the hearth. Before either of them speaks, and occasionally throughout the play, there is a shout of raucous laughter from a crowd of men below.

LANDLORD [*rummaging*]. Such frills and furbelows the woman has, such finery. [*He starts nervously.*] What noise was that, girl?

NELL. I heard nothing, Father.

LANDLORD. 'Twas you crackling the kindling. Come away from that fireplace, girl—you had me jumping from my skin. [*He returns to the valise.*]

NELL. Shall I not kindle the fire, Father?

LANDLORD. Eh?

NELL. Shall I not kindle the fire?

LANDLORD. Nay, woman, would you have me waste good fuel on such a pair?

NELL. It is autumn and the nights grow cold.

LANDLORD. Then let them freeze.

NELL. But, Father . . .

LANDLORD. I say, let the swine freeze. And do you stand over there by the passage and tell me if you hear them coming. [*NELL goes to the opening R.*] God save us, what is this? [*He pulls out a letter with a large red seal dangling.*] Aha, now we have you, my beauties.

NELL. What is it, Father?

LANDLORD. What is it! What is it, eh! A letter, my girl, a letter with a seal to it!

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

NELL. Father, why do you make a mystery of them? The man is what he says he is—a groom who travels with his lady, and she, a lady on a journey to her kinswoman.

LANDLORD. A fine story, fine enough to deceive wits less sharp than mine! A groom, eh! I'll groom him. I tell you, girl, as sure as I'm alive that man is—is—Charles Stuart, put to rout at Worcester, and flying the country. Aye, and with a thousand guineas on his head.

NELL. I do not believe it.

LANDLORD. And who are you, a chit of a girl, to believe, or disbelieve? You did not see his haughty manner . . . “Landlord, stable my lady's horse . . . Landlord, a room for my lady, away from this rabble of soldiery.” “Away from the soldiers” do you note. Why should they hide from the soldiers if they are honest travellers? He has the manners of a King.

NELL. Charles Stuart is the King.

LANDLORD. What's that? Do you want to hang from the Inn sign for a Royalist? King or no King, there is a thousand guineas on the head of Charles Stuart. . . .

[During the last speech CHARLES has entered from the passage. He is dressed as a groom, aged twenty-one, dark, handsome, tall, with close-cropped hair.]

CHARLES. A large sum for a single head, Landlord.

LANDLORD *[hastily hiding the letter]*. Indeed yes, a

T. C. WALKER

very large sum. [*He peers insolently at CHARLES.*] So you are my Lady's groom?

CHARLES. I am.

LANDLORD. I—I seem to know your face.

CHARLES [*gently*]. I do not know yours, but believe me, I shall remember it to my dying day.

LANDLORD [*with cunning*]. Which may not be far distant, eh?

CHARLES. We must all die soon or late, Landlord. But by your leave I will take my Lady her valise [*he sees it has been opened*] if you have finished with it. I trust her petticoats were to your liking.

LANDLORD. Nay, nay, I have not touched it.

CHARLES. Never waste a lie, man, when you cannot be believed. [*He goes out with the valise.*]

LANDLORD. The vermin! A deep one! Quickly, the letter before they see it is gone. [*He opens it.*] Look, girl, at the seal—did ever you see the like of that? Perhaps from the King of France—they say Charles Stuart is in league with him. Plague take it—I cannot read—my eyes are dimmed. Read it for me, girl.

NELL. But, Father, it is not mine or yours to read.

LANDLORD. Read it, I say.

NELL. But if they should return.

LANDLORD. Hasten then. [*She takes the letter.*]

NELL [*reading*]. “To my Lady Coningsby, at the Manor of Trent, in the County of Dorset. My Lady,

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

since I last wrote to you I would have you know that. . . .” Father, ’tis not for our eyes.

LANDLORD. Devil take you, girl, read on.

NELL [*very portentously, she is laughing at her father*]. . . . “I would have you know that your kinswoman, my wife, has been brought to bed with child, which was three weeks before her time. Wherefore I beg you with all haste to come to us, since . . . since with all matters of the Manor on hand, and no help to be had from any reasonable creature I am at sixes and sevens.”—Poor man [*she sighs*], I cannot read the subscription, Father, but I do not think it is from the King of France.

LANDLORD. The letter is a blind. Does the woman look like a wet-nurse or the man either . . . ?

[LADY JULIANA CONINGSBY enters, from the passageway, unseen by the others. She is twenty-six or -seven, a handsome woman dressed in a riding-habit of the period. She is followed by CHARLES.]

I wager you he’s Charles Stuart from the top of his head to the sole of his swaggering boots and the woman—I swear the woman is his mistress.

JULIANA. Landlord!

LANDLORD. Oh! milady.

JULIANA. Landlord, your mind is as foul as your inn.

LANDLORD. Milady, I meant no harm, milady. It was but a figure of speech, a slip of the tongue.

JULIANA. Aye, and but a slip of the hand to rifle my valise. I doubt not you have read the letter from my kinsman.

LANDLORD. Milady, I . . .

JULIANA. Then perhaps you will return it to me . . .

LANDLORD. Milady . . .

JULIANA. At once! or shall my man take it from you? [CHARLES *advances.*]

LANDLORD. No, no—here it is, milady.

JULIANA. Now leave us. We do not wish to be disturbed.

LANDLORD. Yes, milady. [*He sidles to the door.*]
I understand, [*unpleasantly*] indeed I understand.

[*He exits door L., very hurriedly as CHARLES moves towards him.*]

CHARLES. The fox!

[*NELL has remained by the window. Now she comes forward.*]

NELL. Milady—your Majesty—

JULIANA. Quiet, girl! What are you saying?

NELL. I know him, milady. I know he is the King. I pray you both to have a care.

CHARLES. Are you for the King, my girl?

NELL. Indeed I am, your Majesty.

CHARLES. An English rose! [*He goes to her.*]

NELL. Your Majesty, I must go.

CHARLES. Nay, you shall stay.

NELL. No—my father—I dare not—I must watch

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

him. He suspects your Majesty and he may tell the soldiers—I beg you have a care and I will help you if I can. [*Exit L.*]

CHARLES [*after a pause*]. So we have at least one friend in this accursed inn. [*He goes to the window.*]

JULIANA. But her father is an enemy, your Majesty. We are in a trap.

CHARLES. A trap—by heaven, you are right! [*He opens the window. There is another shout of laughter from below.*] A troop of rebel horse and a fox of an inn-keeper! I had as soon share an inn with the devil himself.

JULIANA. Wherefore I beg your Majesty not to expose yourself.

CHARLES. The King must hide his face from twenty misbegotten hirelings, eh?

JULIANA. Your Majesty knows well the price upon your head.

CHARLES. Full well, Juliana, yet had they priced me higher I had been dead a hundred times.

JULIANA. No, your Majesty, some love you so well they would not sell you for ten thousand thousand guineas.

CHARLES. You shame me, Juliana. You are one of my faithful and loyal subjects. Egad, if we could escape this trap then—then—we should but fall into another. Look, Juliana [*she comes to him at the window*]—a quiet country, green lanes, and hanging boughs, gentle hills and the evening mist rolling down the

valleys to the sea. A lovely land—yet Death waits for me in every corner.

[A shout of laughter from below.]

JULIANA. A fine country to live in, your Majesty.

CHARLES. And to die in. I am weary. They have hunted me so long. I long to cry, "Here I am, take me, kill me, but, by our Lady, give me peace".

JULIANA. A slow killing. . . .

CHARLES. Yes, that is true. They would worry at me. A mockery of trial, and then, another grinning Stuart head in Whitehall and Stuart blood dripping to the pavement.

JULIANA. Not only Stuart blood. My blood too—there is a penalty for helping your Majesty.

CHARLES. I pray God I may never be unmindful of your courage, Juliana, and of the debt I owe you.

[He takes her hands. They stand with the sunlight on them. It is pleasant to believe at this moment that CHARLES will not forget. JULIANA starts away and looks across the street.]

JULIANA. Your Majesty—look. *[She points.]* 'Tis Harry Wilmot.

CHARLES. 'Fore God, so 'tis.

[JULIANA beckons across the street.]

JULIANA. He sees us. He crosses the road.

CHARLES. Poor Harry is blown, but not so blown as his mare. . . . *[He leans out.]* Come up, Harry, come up.

JULIANA. Stand back, your Majesty *[pulling him*

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

away and leaning out]. Stand in your saddle, Harry. The soldiers are in the yard at the back. Quick and they will not see. So—you can reach.

[Two hands appear at the window ledge and presently the head and shoulders of HARRY WILMOT. He is a jovial thick-set man of forty—he can just get through the window.]

WILMOT *[gasping]*. Pull, for God’s sake, pull.

[They do so—he lands on the floor with a thud.]

WILMOT. Egad, I thought I should stick half way. I lose no flesh, your Majesty, though I’ve scarce had a square meal for a month. *[He scrambles to his feet.]* Thank God I find your Majesty safe!

CHARLES. Safe is not quite the right word, Harry. There is a troop of rebel horse quartered in this inn. But tell us your news.

WILMOT. One moment, your Majesty, my mare. *[He goes to the window and looks out, comes back with his fingers to his lips.]* Ssh—I thought so, safe enough. Asleep, your Majesty, fast asleep. A fine mare, Dolly, but given overmuch to sleep. The moment she halts sweet slumber takes her in his arms. Not but what she wakes quick enough at the smell of the nose-bag.

JULIANA. How did you find us, Harry?

WILMOT. I will tell you. . . . Your Majesty, I say confound the man who cannot keep his breeches safe.

CHARLES. Oddsfish yes, a man should be master of his own breeches. But you still have yours.

WILMOT. And never will lose them, for it unmans a man to be without breeches. But listen; while you lay at the inn at Charmouth last night, I waited on

the beach for Limbry, the sailor, to bring his boat to carry you to France. But he did not come. So I set forth to find him, for had he not a hundred sovereigns for carrying us to France? Your Majesty will scarce believe what had happened.

CHARLES. What was it?

WILMOT. I found him in his house, locked in the bedroom.

CHARLES. A woman, eh?

WILMOT. Not a woman, a she-devil, his wife. She had got word of the affair and being frightened for him, stole his breeches and locked him in. There he was, teeth chattering, knees knocking, cursing women, wind, and his naked legs, and our fair wind for France whistling round his hams.

CHARLES. And then?

WILMOT. I bade him keep the hundred sovereigns and buy himself a hundred pair of breeches. Then back to Charmouth, you gone, and the place full of soldiers; but, your Majesty, while there the place thrown into an uproar at the news of your Majesty's death.

CHARLES. But I am not dead, Harry.

WILMOT. Not here, your Majesty, not here. But you are dead in Charmouth, seven miles away. For a man came galloping in, crying he had caught and slain your Majesty near Pilsden Hill, bringing your coat for proof and calling Heaven to witness that the thousand guineas for your head were his.

CHARLES. But I still have my coat.

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

WILMOT. So I see, your Majesty, so I see. I know your Majesty was not slain, because the coat he had was not yours. [*He roars with laughter.*] Besides I knew you were not riding Pilsden way. But I did not breathe a word. Who was I to come between a man and a thousand guineas? for indeed he was honest enough, though drunk, and had slain somebody—oh, yes, he had slain somebody, but not your Majesty. [*He laughs again.*]

JULIANA. And they believed him?

WILMOT. I’faith, yes. Bells ringing, ale flowing, the village dancing for the death of Charles Stuart. But I hit Dolly on the rump to waken her, whispered the truth in her ear and so after you.

JULIANA. Would to God false news of your Majesty’s death were to come to this inn.

CHARLES. Aye. But here I am, very much alive, in company with a troop of rebels.

WILMOT. Do they suspect your Majesty?

CHARLES. The landlord does, and he’s against me. But not the soldiers. We were into them before we knew. My Lady Juliana saved us then, for she cursed me roundly for setting her down from her horse in a puddle. She has a sharp tongue and I looked little of a king.

JULIANA. Your Majesty splashed me to my knees.

CHARLES. Heaven forgive me, Juliana—such shapely limbs shall henceforth be my constant care.

JULIANA. Your Majesty is kind. For the present I will have a care of them myself.

WILMOT. Your Majesty—perhaps it were as well we discussed my Lady's limbs when you and they are in a safer place. You say the landlord is not safe.

CHARLES. He is off the scent for a moment. But if poking and prying can find the truth, he'll have it in an hour.

WILMOT. And then . . .

CHARLES. And then the bells of this town will ring at my death, Harry, and they will not lie.

JULIANA [*suddenly*]. They shall lie!

CHARLES. Egad, they shall not ring at all. Am I to be caught like a rat in a trap? Come, Harry, let's ride boldly forth.

JULIANA. No, no, your Majesty—wait!

CHARLES. I tell you I am weary of this hiding. Has courage vanished with my kingdom? I'll not wait another moment. If death has come at last, let's face it.

[*He strides towards the door. There is a shout of laughter from below.*]

JULIANA. Your Majesty, you shall not!

CHARLES. I say, I shall! Am I to be ruled by a petticoat? Do you dare command me?

JULIANA. I dare anything—have I not dared everything? And I say you shall not go yet. [*She holds him.*]

CHARLES. Unhand me, woman!

JULIANA. No, I will not. Help me, my lord Harry!

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

CHARLES. 'Fore God!

WILMOT. Your Majesty, for God's sake wait.

CHARLES. Let me go, I say.

[He tries to throw them off, and swinging his arm, strikes JULIANA's face.]

JULIANA *[stricken]*. Charles—Your Majesty . . .
[She covers her face with her hands.]

CHARLES. Juliana—forgive me. *[In a flash his anger is gone and he is all contrition.]*

JULIANA. It is nothing—but I beg your Majesty to wait—I have a plan.

CHARLES. What is it?

JULIANA. If the bells of Bridport rang because your Majesty was dead, then indeed you could ride boldly forth.

CHARLES. Dead. . . .

JULIANA. Do you not see?

WILMOT. I'faith—I have it. Milady, you're a witch! It needs but another soldier to kill a stranger, and they are all for killing strangers, bring back his coat for proof and your Majesty is dead, in Bridport as in Charmouth.

JULIANA. Not a soldier. You, Harry, they do not know you. Will you play the part?

WILMOT. With all my heart. Whom shall I kill?

JULIANA. There is no need to kill. You must creep a mile from the town, turn your mare about, come back again hell for leather with news of the King's death.

T. C. WALKER

WILMOT. I doubt that Dolly can bestir herself to gallop. I'll ask her when she wakens. But I must have a coat to bring to show I've killed the King.

JULIANA. Nay, you shall have better proof than that.

CHARLES. Bring them my head on a charger, Harry—then they'll believe.

JULIANA. Your Majesty, I am trying to help you. If you cannot assist perhaps you will . . .

CHARLES [*laughing*]. Keep silence, eh! There goes my Kingdom again, Harry! England has lost a King and found a Queen.

JULIANA [*to Wilmot*]. You shall bring his Majesty's gauntlets.

CHARLES. Not that, Juliana, I will not part with them. They were given me by my father.

JULIANA. They have your Majesty's name and a crown worked in silver. How often have I begged you to be rid of them! What better proof that you are the King?

CHARLES. They are all that is left to me of my father. You cannot have them.

JULIANA. We are in danger. There are other lives than yours.

[*There is a silence. CHARLES takes the gauntlets from his coat and hands them to WILMOT.*]

CHARLES. Take them, Harry.

JULIANA. And ride for your life, my lord.

"CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . ."

WILMOT. I'll ride as fast as Dolly will run. Would to God you would let me kill some lecherous rebel and show his blood upon my sword, then I could bring colour to the part.

JULIANA. There is no time.

WILMOT. No time to kill a rebel! I'faith we *are* in a hurry!

JULIANA. Is all safe below?

WILMOT. Aye, no one in sight. Just Dolly dozing.
[*Leaning out*] Hi, my pretty, stir yourself!

JULIANA. You must go at once.

WILMOT. Then lower me gently, and for God's sake push me if I stick.

[*He goes out feet first. The others help him. His hands disappear from the sill.*]

CHARLES. God speed you, Harry!

JULIANA. Ride like the devil, my lord.

[*The clip-clop of his horse's hooves rises to a gallop and dies away in the distance.*]

JULIANA. And now we must wait. [CHARLES comes to her.]

CHARLES. Juliana, forgive me. I struck you.

JULIANA. Your Majesty's hand was not heavy. You have much to bear.

CHARLES. I struck you on the face. May I not make amends? [*He advances to kiss her.*]

JULIANA. No, no, your Majesty, else I should have you striking me all day and making amends.

T. C. WALKER

CHARLES. The offer was well intentioned.

JULIANA. A woman is seldom in doubt as to your Majesty's intentions.

CHARLES [*he comes closer to her*]. Juliana—in fifteen minutes we may be free to run before the hounds again—or we may be caught. In the meantime. . . . [*He tries to take her in his arms.*]

JULIANA. No, your Majesty.

CHARLES. Juliana! have you no feeling? [*He holds her.*]

JULIANA. It is my turn to command you to unhand me and, by heaven! you shall. [*She pushes him from her.*] You dare to ask me if I have no feeling? Have I not felt for you those fourteen days? [*Her face is flaming.*] Do you think I would have risked my life had I no feeling? and now, when death is on the very threshold, you would toy with me as though I were a doll. . . . [*She is speechless for a moment.*] Will your Majesty never grow up?

CHARLES. Never, Juliana. [*He laughs, but we know he has met his match.*]

JULIANA. Then toy with life, your Majesty, but do not toy with me.

[*CHARLES is at a loss for an answer. At this moment the door L. bursts open and NELL enters. She is breathless.*]

NELL. Your Majesty, milady—one of the soldiers...

JULIANA. Yes, girl.

[*There are stumbling footsteps outside.*]

NELL. Coming now—my father has told him.

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

CHARLES. I'll settle him. [*He goes towards the door.*]

NELL. No, no! The others will hear you. Carefully, I beg you. The soldier is a little drunk. I will help you—trust me.

JULIANA. Listen, girl—we must hold them for five minutes—then we are safe.

[A CROMWELLIAN SOLDIER *enters with drawn sword. He is a little drunk. The LANDLORD follows, but is at pains to keep out of harm's way.*]

LANDLORD [*pointing to CHARLES*]. There he is—there is our thousand guinea soldier.

SOLDIER [*advancing to CHARLES*]. I know your face.

CHARLES [*eyeing him*]. Oddsfish, another of them . . . and is my face to your liking?

SOLDIER. 'Fore God, you are a calm one. [*He turns to LANDLORD.*] Call the others, there is danger in his eye.

CHARLES. Are you afraid, soldier? I am unarmed.

LANDLORD. Aye. Take him yourself, soldier. We must not share the reward with thirty others.

[*The SOLDIER hesitates. JULIANA crosses to him.*]

JULIANA. Have pity on us, sir, we are lovers, and you have loved, yourself.

SOLDIER. Lovers! I think, sir, that you are Charles Stuart.

JULIANA. No, no! Listen, sir—we ride together as a lady and her groom. That is but half the truth, a poor deception.

LANDLORD. Indeed it is!

JULIANA. We are lovers. [*She puts her arms around CHARLES' neck to prove her words.*] He is my groom and my lover, and we ride away secretly together.

NELL [*innocently*]. Oh, is not that beautiful!

LANDLORD. Beautiful indeed—a lovely lie. But ask her where they ride from, soldier, that'll fetch them.

SOLDIER. Aye, whence come ye?

JULIANA. We ride from . . .

NELL [*breaking in*]. Why, from Worcestershire.

LANDLORD. Silence, girl. . . .

NELL. But is it not so, milady? My father and the soldier have seen . . .

LANDLORD. Woman, be quiet . . .

NELL. . . . Have seen your mare was last shod in Worcestershire and so they thought you were the King, sir, But I say why should a King ride from battle with a lady a-pillion? Does he take ladies into battle? And now we find the truth, that you are lovers. *Is not that beautiful?*

LANDLORD. 'Fore God, I'll pluck the tongue from out your prating mouth.

SOLDIER. Steady, man. . . .

LANDLORD. Has she not told them what we found? Come here, you gabbling wench.

NELL. But, Father. . . .

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

LANDLORD. Come here, I say. [*He goes towards her threateningly.*]

NELL [*going to* SOLDIER]. Oh help me, sir, my father means me harm. [*She clings to him enticingly.*]

LANDLORD. Let me have her.

SOLDIER. Nay, landlord, you shall not touch her.

NELL. He will beat me. Help me—I am fainting. [*She throws her weight into his arms. The SOLDIER drops his sword.*]

SOLDIER. She’s fainted. [*He lowers her to the ground.*] Her eyelids flutter. I’faith, what lovely lips!

JULIANA. Stroke her hand, sir. ’Tis a certain cure for faintness.

LANDLORD. ’Tis but a sham, I tell you. Let me get to her. I’ll soon cure her.

SOLDIER [*the wine in him is speaking*]. Stand back, unnatural man, is she not your own daughter and a lovely one at that? Ah! she opens her eyes.

[*A horse is heard galloping in the distance.*]

NELL [*faintly*]. I am frightened.
[*The horse comes nearer.*]

SOLDIER. Nay, nay, my pretty, you are safe.
[*The horse draws up below. There is a shout below. The SOLDIER helps NELL to her feet.*]

NELL. I am better. But hold me, sir, I tremble at the knees.

SOLDIER. I’ll hold you right enough. [*He does.*]
[*CHARLES picks up the sword.*]

LANDLORD. Watch him, soldier, he has your sword.

CHARLES [*laughing*]. Have no fear, sir—take your sword. Nay, I see your arms are better occupied. Let me sheathe it for you. [*He does so.*]

[*The noise below grows louder.*]

LANDLORD. For God's sake, take him now.

SOLDIER [*puzzled*]. But he has given me back my sword. Tell me, sir—are you the King?

CHARLES [*looks at him fixedly*]. Am I the King? [*He laughs bitterly.*] There is no King in England now. We ride from Worcester, it is true, and there, a fortnight since all that is left of kingship perished. But tell me, sir, if I were the King would you, a common soldier, dare to lift your sword against me now? The King, ordained by God to rule England for the people's good, is vanquished; a price upon his head, he flies the country, yet would you kill him, would you dare to kill him, if you could?

SOLDIER. There is power in your tongue. You almost turn me Royalist.

CHARLES. God forbid! That were an unhappy cause to espouse just now. [*There is the pride of all the Stuarts in his voice.*] And yet I think that even now the King has faithful subjects. For loyalty to the King is loyalty to England and to God, since God made England and the King to rule it. Not Marston Moor, nor Worcester field, nor scaffolds built in Whitehall can alter that, for the King is King by the grace of God, and not the will of man.

[*During this speech the noise below has grown louder*

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

and louder. As CHARLES finishes speaking a man is heard to shout high above the others “The King is dead”. Then there is silence everywhere for a moment; the people on the stage are still. Presently the noise breaks out again, there is rattling of bridle chains, clatter of horses’ hoofs, shouting and cries of “The Stuart is dead”. The SOLDIER strides to the open window. The LANDLORD approaches CHARLES.]

LANDLORD [*he is bewildered and frightened*]. The King is dead . . . But you are . . .

CHARLES. The King is King by the grace of God. He will not die at the hands of men.

[*The LANDLORD shrinks from him. WILMOT enters.*]

WILMOT. Where is the landlord of this accursed inn?

SOLDIER [*coming from the window*]. They say Charles Stuart is slain.

WILMOT. Aye, that he is. Did I not kill him myself two miles away upon the London road. See, I bring his gauntlets for proof. Look—the royal crown and his sign!

SOLDIER. [*taking the gauntlets*]. The royal crown—’tis so; you say you killed him?

WILMOT. Yes—and the whole place gone mad for joy of it. Barrels broached in the inn—the place swimming in wine, and the soldiers drinking free because the landlord is not there to serve them. [*He roars with laughter.*]

LANDLORD [*panic-stricken*]. No, no—they must not steal my wine.

WILMOT. Are you—the landlord?

LANDLORD. Aye, they must not steal my wine. Stop them—stop them.

WILMOT. Stop them yourself—are you not master of your own house? Hasten, man, hasten.

[*The LANDLORD scuttles out. WILMOT hastens his departure.*]

SOLDIER [*looks first at CHARLES, then at the gauntlets, then at WILMOT*]. You say you've killed Charles Stuart?

[*In the distance the bells of Bridport begin to peal.*]

WILMOT. You hear the bells—they peal for his death.

NELL [*to SOLDIER*]. Come, sir, I will give you wine.

CHARLES. You shall drink to the death of Charles Stuart.

[*The SOLDIER is puzzled. He looks at WILMOT again, then goes to CHARLES and peers into his face. Presently a smile lights on his face—it grows and grows until he roars with laughter.*]

SOLDIER. I'faith, my pretty, yes. I will drink, I will drink. [*He is suddenly serious and hands CHARLES the gauntlets.*] But not to—to—the death of the King. God save you, Sir. [*To NELL*] Come, my chicken.

[*He goes out, followed by NELL.*]

JULIANA. And so 'tis done, my lord.

WILMOT. Yes, 'tis done. I lashed poor Dolly to a lather. I'faith she'll sleep for a month now.

CHARLES. And they believed you, Harry?

WILMOT. Aye, they believed.

[*The bells ring louder.*]

“CHARLES—BY THE GRACE OF GOD . . .”

CHARLES. And because I am dead they ring the bells!

WILMOT. But some weep, your Majesty.

CHARLES. Some weep, and some laugh—a strange world, Harry.

[There is a silence.]

JULIANA. We must go quickly.

WILMOT. Aye, strike back across the moor to Trent. There is no wind for France and no boat to take us.

[NELL enters with wine cups on a tray.]

CHARLES. Here is our play actress. Oddsfish, 'twas well done! A pretty swoon.

NELL. I have brought wine for your Majesty and you, Milady, and for you, sir. You must drink it and go.

[They take the wine cups but do not drink.]

CHARLES *[to NELL]*. Tell me—why did you help me?

NELL. Your Majesty—my brother was killed at Marston Moor. He was for the King and so am I.

CHARLES. My girl—you shall drink too.

NELL. Not I, your Majesty.

CHARLES. Yes, it is our command. *[He hands her his cup.]* You shall drink my health from my cup.

NELL. Your Majesty, I . . .

[She takes the cup and she—WILMOT and JULIANA drink, whispering: “His Majesty the King.”]

CHARLES takes his cup and drinks.]

CHARLES. "To my loyal and faithful subjects."
[*There is a moment's silence. The bells are silent too, then a burst of laughter from below.*]

WILMOT. Come, your Majesty. I'll wake Dolly.
[*He goes.*]

JULIANA. Farewell, my chick. You have done well.

[*She goes and CHARLES follows. NELL stops him.*]

NELL. Your Majesty, may I kiss your hand.

CHARLES. Sweet one, may I kiss your lips. [*He does so.*]

NELL. Your Majesty, I shall think the better of my lips all the days of my life.

CHARLES. God bless you.

NELL. And God save the King!

[*He goes out. NELL goes to the window. The setting sun has turned to red and shines full on her. There is a sound of horses moving off. The bells ring louder. NELL leans from the window, waves and blows a kiss.*

And the CURTAIN falls.]

“BRING ME MY BOW”

SYDNEY BOX

CHARACTERS

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY, *wife of the Minister for War.*

MISS GOOSENS, *headmistress of St. Christopher's School.*

MISS ARMSTRONG, *an assistant mistress.*

MARY BLAKE

CONSTANCE KENT

JOAN BERRY

VERONICA LEIGH

STELLA PROUT

ELSIE HAVERGILL

OTHER GIRLS, MISTRESSES, ETC.

} *senior girls of the school, all
aged seventeen or eighteen.*

The action takes place on the platform during the annual speech-day at St. Christopher's School, and in Miss Goosens' study, later the same day.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—When I first planned “Bring Me My Bow,” Sir Harry himself actually appeared in the Prologue, made his fire-eating speech to the girls, and later figured in martial array in Mary's dream. It was only because of constant pleas from producers of all-women companies and other groups with large memberships of women for plays without men that I liquidated Sir Harry and gave his lines to his wife.

So with the dream scene. I visualised this originally as an ambitious piece of stagecraft, calling for costumes, music and additional

No performance of this play may take place unless a licence has been obtained from Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.2, or their authorised agent.

SYDNEY BOX

cast. I have now written it in such a way that it can be played simply with just the nine principal members of the cast, or grandiosely, with all the trappings at the producer's command.

One other point—six of the nine characters are described as schoolgirls, but that fact need not deter adult groups from doing the play. The average schoolgirl to-day is almost indistinguishable from her mother—and in any case none of my characters is younger than Juliet.

The annual speech-day at St. Christopher's School provides the prologue to our play. Grouped on the platform (which can be represented by a narrow strip of stage in front of either the main, or "tab" curtains) are the headmistress (MISS GOOSENS), the guest of honour, LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY, wife of the Minister for War, and four or five of the senior mistresses of the school. In front of the headmistress is a small table on which are several rolls of white paper (all beginning "This is to certify . . ."), a pile of books, a silver cup and a bottle of water covered by an upturned glass.

When the play opens the presentation of prizes is in full swing. On the platform from S.L. emerge, one by one, girls from St. Christopher's. Each girl, as the headmistress announces her name, takes her prize from the fair hands of LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY, bobs awkwardly and exits S.R. The headmistress and the other mistresses on the stage lead the applause, as each presentation is announced, with a ladylike clapping of hands.

HEADMISTRESS. Stella Prout—Oxford Schools Certificate and school prize for English and Botany. [*Applause. STELLA takes her certificate and book, and exits S.R.*] Elsie Havergill—Oxford Schools Certificate and school prize for Mathematics. [*Applause. ELSIE takes her certificate and book, and exits S.R.*] And now we come to the Sixth Form. Usually, as you

“BRING ME MY BOW”

parents who have visited us on previous speech-days will remember, we have been able to announce at least one—and sometimes as many as three or four—State scholarships to the universities from among the senior girls of the school. This year, mainly because of the drastic reduction in the number of Government grants necessitated by the—ah—very considerable expenditure on national rearmament, I regret to announce that no girl from St. Christopher's has been successful in winning a State scholarship. Ordinarily, I think, we might have counted on our head girl, Mary Blake, going on to represent St. Christopher's at Oxford, but alas! that is not to be. I know we all regret this very much, but I am sure that none of us will really grudge any sacrifice we are called upon to make for the safety and solidarity of our great and glorious Empire [*applause*]*—especially when a former scholar of St. Christopher's, Lady Champion-Cholmondeley* [*applause*]*—or, as we knew her, Lettice Abernethy, is the wife and helpmeet of the man whose stern responsibility it is to carry out a rearmament programme that will make it clear once and for all that Britain can and will protect her glorious heritage. However, there are still the school prizes, and we will now proceed to them. Mary Blake, our head girl, takes a Higher Schools Certificate, with special distinction in English and History, and school prizes both for those subjects and for the most popular girl in the school.* [*Applause*]. *MARY takes her certificate and books and exits S.R.*] The Hopeworthy prize for Science goes to Constance Kent. [*Applause. CONSTANCE takes her prize and exits S.R.*] The Headmistress's prize for the girl showing the greatest progress

during the year is won by Joan Berry. [*Applause.* JOAN *takes her book and exits* S.R.] And last, but by no means least, the Gates Cup for the best athletics performance of the year goes to Veronica Leigh. [*Applause of a notably cordial nature greets* VERONICA, *a strapping wench, who takes the cup and exits* S.R.] That concludes the prizes; and now I am going to ask Lady Champion-Cholmondeley to say a few words to us.

[*Applause.* MISS GOOSENS *sits down and* LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY *comes forward to speak.*]

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. Miss Goosens, girls of St. Christopher's, ladies and gentlemen. I count it as great a privilege as it is a pleasure to come back to St. Christopher's for the annual speech day; to see all the old places and so many of the old faces; to see another generation of bright, eager girls growing up properly equipped to play their part in our national life. It seems only a few short months ago that I was here myself, wearing a gym. dress and referring to Miss Goosens behind her back as—well, perhaps I had better say no more about that! [*Laughter.*] Of course, I am really quite the wrong sort of person to come and present the prizes at a speech day. When I was here, I don't mind admitting, I was practically always at the bottom of my form. As for prizes, the only thing I ever managed to win was the booby prize at a whist drive in my husband's constituency the other day. [*Laughter.*] Still, I think I can truthfully say that I have never found my lack of brilliance at school any handicap at all in adult life—although I well remember that I was the despair of Miss Goosens—and I want to say this to the girls who haven't won prizes to-day. There is something much more im-

portant in life than anything you can learn out of a book—I can see Miss Goosens looking at me and I know I shall get into trouble afterwards for saying this—but it's true! And that something, girls, is character. It's character that makes a woman a good wife and mother. It's character that counts in business and in Parliament. And it is character that has always been the backbone of the British nation. Whenever we have been attacked, the British character has pulled us through, just as it did in the last war. And that brings me to the most important thing I want to say to you this afternoon. You girls have just heard from Miss Goosens that the number of Government grants for scholarships has been drastically cut down because the money is urgently needed for the great new rearmament plan, and I want to tell you as briefly and as simply as I can just what that plan means to the Empire and to you. Those of you who read the papers will have learned quite recently what we behind the scenes have known for some time—that certain of the other great powers of the world are rearming steadily, systematically and scientifically to an extent unprecedented in the history of the world. Consider for a moment what that means. It means that those nations are becoming a menace to the peace of the world—and particularly to any other nations foolish enough to leave themselves unprotected. We realised at once—and by “we” I mean my husband who, as you know, is the Minister for War, and those who think as he does—that it was imperative that Britain must be able to defend herself and her citizens from any danger of attack. So we decided to rearm—to make Britain so strong that any other power would

think twice before attacking her. We determined that we would build gun for gun, plane for plane and battleship for battleship. More than that, we determined that we would follow the precept of the Bible and build two guns for a gun, two planes for a plane, two ships for a ship. But—and I say this with all solemnity—we also determined that those guns and planes and ships should never be used except in defence of our rights and our security against an aggressor. [*Applause.*] A strong nation is a respected nation, and a Britain armed means a world at peace. We do not forget that the last war brought out some of our people's greatest virtues—obedience, courage, endurance and self-sacrifice—a self-sacrifice that went even to the length of men laying down their lives for their country. We hope and pray that such a sacrifice will never again be demanded of us—but we are determined to be prepared and ready should the emergency ever arise. [*Applause.*] That's all I want to say except this. . . . You girls of St. Christopher's have had to sacrifice your scholarships this year and by doing that you have done your bit towards bringing about national security. But I should be very sorry if that meant that St. Christopher's would not be represented at Oxford this year and so I have had a quiet little chat with Miss Goosens and I think we have hit on a way to get around the difficulty. I will leave it to her to tell you all about it.

[*Applause.* LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY *sits down* and MISS GOOSENS *comes forward.*]

MISS GOOSENS. First I must thank Lady Champion-Cholmondeley for one of the most inspiring addresses we have ever had at a speech-day. I can assure you,

“BRING ME MY BOW”

Lady Champion-Cholmondeley, that we shall remember it and treasure it for a very long time. [*Applause.*] And now it is my privilege to make one of the most important announcements that has fallen to my lot since I became headmistress of St. Christopher's. When I told Lady Champion-Cholmondeley about our sad lack of scholarships this year, she said a very simple and, I think, a very beautiful thing. She said: "I must ask Sir Harry about it." Well, she asked Sir Harry—and the result is that he and Lady Champion-Cholmondeley have presented St. Christopher's with an open exhibition to be awarded annually to the girl the governors decide is best fitted to go on to Oxford to take up a university career. As our term ends to-morrow, there will not be time to consult the governors about the method of selection this year. I have therefore consulted Lady Champion-Cholmondeley's wishes and she has decided to award the first exhibition to the girl from the Sixth Form who writes the best essay on the words: "A Britain armed means a world at peace." So that there shall be no delay in announcing the award, the girls of the Sixth Form will be excused preparation and will remain in their studies this evening and complete their essays, which should be handed in to me immediately after prayers to-morrow morning. I don't propose to thank Lady Champion-Cholmondeley again—my heart is too full for that and she knows only too well what we think of her. [*Applause.* LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY *acknowledges it with a smile and a bow.*] And now, I am sure you are all ready for your tea, so we will conclude yet another St. Christopher's speech-day with the school hymn.

SYDNEY BOX

[There is a shuffling of feet as all those on the platform rise. One of the other mistresses begins to conduct, facing towards the audience. A chord is struck on a pianoforte off-stage, and girls' voices, also off-stage, reinforced by those of the characters visible to us, begin to sing Blake's "Jerusalem".¹]

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the Holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?
And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold!
Bring me my Arrows of desire!
Bring me my Spear! O, clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of Fire!
I will not cease from mental fight;
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

[After two or three lines have been sung, the lights fade out leaving the stage in darkness, but the singing goes on until, as the end of the second verse is reached, the lights go up again and the curtains open on MISS GOOSENS' study. MISS GOOSENS is seated at her desk, finishing a letter. She puts it into its envelope and is just closing the flap, when there is a knock at the door.]

¹ A unison setting of "Jerusalem", with pianoforte accompaniment, may be obtained from Messrs. J. Curwen & Sons, Ltd., 24 Berners Street, W.1.

“BRING ME MY BOW”

MISS GOOSENS. Come in.

[The door opens and MISS ARMSTRONG, one of the mistresses who was on the platform during the prologue, enters. She is carrying an armful of reports.]

MISS ARMSTRONG. Here's the last batch of end-of-term reports. I have been through them—they're all in order.

MISS GOOSENS. Leave them there, will you? I'll sign them in the morning.

MISS ARMSTRONG. You look tired.

MISS GOOSENS. Hm! Speech-days are a little trying when you've seen as many as I have—and kept up the amiable pretence that each is better than the last.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Well, Lady Lettice certainly sprang a surprise to-day.

MISS GOOSENS. Oh that! That was all settled ages ago. Sir Harry's after a peerage.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Then why on earth did you keep it so dark? If only you'd announced it a week ago, the girls wouldn't have had to rush through their essays this evening.

MISS GOOSENS. Showmanship, my dear.

MISS ARMSTRONG. I shouldn't have thought you cared that much for showmanship.

MISS GOOSENS. I don't. It was Sir Harry's idea.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Oh, I see.

MISS GOOSENS. I agreed, partly because I had no alternative and partly because it made no difference

SYDNEY BOX

anyway. Whatever test we set, Mary Blake's pretty certain to win.

MISS ARMSTRONG. That's true. She's a nice child. She ought to do well.

MISS GOSENS. Well, this exhibition's her last chance. Her people haven't got a ha'penny.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Is it as bad as all that?

MISS GOSENS. Worse! She came here with a grant—and even so it must have been a near thing. Father was killed in the war. Mother runs a laundry.

MISS ARMSTRONG. A—— [*She pauses as there is a knock at the door.*]

MISS GOSENS. Come in.

[*The door opens and MARY BLAKE comes in.*]

MARY. May I speak to you for a minute, Miss Goosens?

MISS GOSENS. Yes, Mary. What is it?

MARY. I . . . Miss Goosens, would you excuse me from writing this essay, please?

MISS GOSENS. Excuse you! Don't you want to go to Oxford?

MARY. Yes.

MISS GOSENS. And you know what'll happen if you don't?

MARY. Yes. I'll have to go back and help mother with the laundry. Still, that won't be so bad.

MISS ARMSTRONG. But Mary, you'd set your heart on going to Oxford. Don't you want to, any more?

“BRING ME MY BOW”

MARY. Of course I want to—but not this way.

MISS GOOSENS. What's wrong with this way? It's a scholarship just like any other.

MARY. It isn't like any other. I don't mind any ordinary examination, but not this—this beastly essay.

MISS GOOSENS. What's the matter with the essay?

MARY. Everything. . . . [*She suddenly burst out with it.*] Miss Goosens, you see—I don't believe in war. I don't believe in armaments. I don't believe in anything Lady Champion-Cholmondeley said this afternoon—and I think Sir Harry is a career-hunting old hypocrite!

MISS GOOSENS. Mary! How dare you! Please control yourself! I cannot permit such an exhibition of rudeness, especially in front of another member of the staff.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Oh don't mind me—I agree with her.

MISS GOOSENS. You——! Miss Armstrong, what does this mean?

MISS ARMSTRONG. Well, it's true, isn't it? We're spending millions on armaments that no sane person wants, simply to please a pack of politicians with vested interests.

MISS GOOSENS. And what makes you suppose that no sane person wants them? Surely any sane person would wish to be defended from murderers?

MISS ARMSTRONG. Well, in the first place, nobody believes they're for defence.

SYDNEY BOX

MISS GOOSENS. Of course they're for defence. Lady Lettice made that quite clear this afternoon.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Defence against whom?

MISS GOOSENS. Against—well, against anyone who might attack us. Germany, for instance.

MISS ARMSTRONG. But Germany says her arms are for defence, too—and so does everyone else. Apparently we're just defending ourselves against the defence of people who are defending themselves against our defence.

MISS GOOSENS. Surely you don't believe what a German says in preference to Lady Lettice? In any case, don't you realise that if we remain unarmed, we are simply *inviting* someone to step in and conquer us?

MISS ARMSTRONG. How do you know? Nobody's ever tried it yet. If you're violent with a dictator, you've got to be more violent than he is—and that means certain war. If you pile up a huge reserve of armaments, sooner or later somebody'll want to use them—that's what they're for, isn't it?—and *that* means certain war. The only thing nobody's ever troubled to try is pacifism and disarmament.

MISS GOOSENS. It wouldn't work. War is a natural human instinct.

MISS ARMSTRONG. So is duelling—but we've abolished that.

MISS GOOSENS. It would simply mean that we'd be overrun by the first warlike nation that cared to send a boatload of troops across the Channel.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Don't be too sure of that.

There are plenty of people all over the world who feel the same way about it as we do. And even a militarist is going to have some qualms about declaring war on a people who *could* fight if they wanted to, but who *won't* because they believe that war is immoral.

MARY. And say what you like, it would be bound to lead to peace.

MISS GOOSENS. Peace, yes—but nobody wants peace without honour.

MISS ARMSTRONG. I can't see that it is any more honourable to stick a bayonet into a man's stomach [*Miss Goosens winces and says "Tch! Tch!"*] than it is to say: "I will not murder that man, whoever tells me to. He's a decent citizen, with a wife and family like mine—and I won't do it—for their sake as much as his. I will not murder my fellow man, not even if the Minister of War, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Company Sergeant Major, the Duce, the Führer and the King himself all shout themselves blue in the face——"

MISS GOOSENS. Stop! I won't listen to another word!

MARY. But Miss Goosens——

MISS GOOSENS. Silence! I'll have no more of this. . . . I'm an old woman, and I may not be in tune with some modern ideas, but at least I know how to live my life decently and honourably—and I have always tried to teach my girls to do the same. I will not have this decadence, this revolting vulgarity, in my school, either among the girls or the staff. I have always taught my girls to live up to the highest ideals

of the British people, to be proud of their birthright and to accept gladly the responsibilities that go with it. You, apparently, would make parasites of them. You expect the State to defend you and your property, but you propose to give nothing in return. If you had your way, we should be back again in a state of barbarism and lawlessness within a few years. Civilisation would be thrown away.

MISS ARMSTRONG. It will be thrown away much sooner if we have another war.

MISS GOOSENS. That will do! I refuse to discuss it any further.

MARY. But she's right! She——

MISS GOOSENS. As for you, Mary, I am so shocked that I hardly know what to say. I am not at all sure that I ought to allow you to sit for the exhibition in view of what I have just heard——

MARY. I don't want to, anyway. I've just told you that.

MISS GOOSENS [*holding up her hand for silence*]. However, I am convinced that you have been misled and that you are acting under the misguided impression that to be a pacifist is clever. I shall, therefore, allow you to enter——

MARY. But I don't want to!

MISS GOOSENS. You will do as you are told! Sit down here at my desk! Sit down here at my desk! [*They look at each other for a moment; then Mary goes and sits in the chair MISS GOOSENS occupied at the beginning of the scene.*] Now begin your essay at once. I will return in an hour to see how you are progressing.

“BRING ME MY BOW”

Miss Armstrong, I should like a word with you. Follow me, please.

[*She marches majestically out of the room.*]

MARY. I won't do it! I won't!

MISS ARMSTRONG. It's no good, Mary. You and I are too weak to kick against the pricks alone. I've got my job to think about and you've got that scholarship. Better make the best you can of it. Time enough for pacifism when you get to Oxford.

MARY. But—but Miss Armstrong, I've never heard you talk like this before.

MISS ARMSTRONG. I know. One doesn't admit defeat more often than one can help.

MARY. Defeat! But I——

MISS GOOSENS [*appearing again in doorway*]. Miss Armstrong, I am waiting.

MISS ARMSTRONG. Coming, Miss Goosens.

[*She goes. When the door has closed behind them, MARY stabs viciously at the writing-pad in front of her with her pencil. The point breaks and she flings the pencil on the floor. Then she suddenly begins to sob and buries her head in her hands on the desk. The lights slowly fade. In a moment they go up again. MARY is now fast asleep, with her head on the desk, breathing regularly. The door opens slowly and MISS GOOSENS comes in. Her costume has been slightly altered to give her a rather witch-like appearance and her manner has undergone a similar change.*¹]

¹NOTE TO PRODUCERS. From this point on until the re-entry of Miss Goosens shortly before the end of the play (i.e., during the whole of the dream scene) producers are at liberty to vary the stage

SYDNEY BOX

MISS GOOSENS [*coming down to the desk where MARY is sleeping and talking rather as though she were reciting an incantation*]. Mary Blake, Mary Blake, you're wide awake, you're wide awake. Now it's no good your pretending to be asleep. I know you're awake. [*MARY suddenly sits up and stares at her.*] There you are! And I know something else, too! I know what you call me behind my back—you and all the other girls. Yes, I know! It isn't Miss Goosens, is it? [*Mary shakes her head.*] It's Mother Goose, isn't it? [*Mary nods.*] And do you know who Mother Goose really was? [*Mary shakes her head.*] No, I thought not. Well, I'll tell you. She was an old witch who had a book of nursery rhymes. And I'm going to have a book of nursery rhymes, too—new ones! And you're going to write them! I'm going to change the test for Lady Champion-Cholmondeley's scholarship and give it to the best nursery rhymes about the war. Ha, ha! That's going to make a difference, isn't it? That's going to make a big difference! Now then, come on, let's hear your nursery rhyme!

MARY. But I've never written a nursery rhyme.

MISS GOOSENS. Then you'd better learn right away. Meanwhile, I'll go on with somebody else. Constance Kent?

[*CONSTANCE suddenly appears from nowhere.*]

directions whenever necessary to bring them within the scope of their company. This scene, as I have indicated in my preface, may be played entirely by the women of the cast who have already appeared or may be produced as elaborately and fantastically as the company's resources permit. For instance, the three blind men may be introduced in person, or mimed by three of the girls already on the stage, or merely left to the imagination of the audience. The same applies to the ten soldiers and any other persons mentioned in the nursery rhymes

"BRING ME MY BOW"

CONSTANCE. Yes, Mother Goose.

MISS GOOSENS. Let me hear your nursery rhyme.

CONSTANCE. Yes, Mother Goose.

MISS GOOSENS. Wait! First we must have the other judges present. Everything must be in order before we start.

[She claps her hands and LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY appears dressed in a strange costume, a cross between that of Britannia and Mars. She takes up a position on MISS GOOSENS' right. A moment later, MISS ARMSTRONG appears, now dressed in the flowing robes of the traditional figure of Peace and carrying an olive branch. She takes up a position on MISS GOOSENS' left. Meanwhile MISS GOOSENS takes up a pair of scales of the type used in figures of Justice, and CONSTANCE bandages her eyes—a little carelessly so that one eye is left outside the bandage.] Good! Proceed!

CONSTANCE.

Little Jack Horner

Sat in the corner

Making political pie.

The set of his jaw

As he mixed in a war

Plainly said: "What a brave boy am I!"

MISS ARMSTRONG. But Jack Horner didn't fight that war! No sir! Jack Horner sent Tom and Dick and Harry to fight for him.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. I expect he was too important to be spared. Someone must stay at home and direct operations, you know. Now look

SYDNEY BOX

at Sir Harry—it would never do to put him in the firing line.

MISS ARMSTRONG [*grimly*]. I'd like to!

MISS GOOSENS [*consulting her scales*]. Seven out of ten. Next!

[JOAN BERRY *appears from nowhere and offers another rhyme.*]

JOAN.

Little Boy Blue, come blow the alarm!
There's gas in the meadow and guns in the farm.
And where are the boys who went marching to battle?
They're falling like corn to the Lewis guns' rattle.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. That's all wrong!
Soldiers don't wear blue any more. We had khaki
invented specially so that they shouldn't show up
too plainly against the countryside.

MISS ARMSTRONG. I shouldn't worry about that!
By the time they've rolled in the mud once or twice
and had a few limbs blown off, nobody will be able
to distinguish between them and the earth they sprang
from.

MISS GOOSENS [*consulting her scales*]. Six out of ten.
Next!

[VERONICA LEIGH *appears from nowhere and recites her rhyme.*]

VERONICA.

Little Miss Nan
Has lost her man
And doesn't know where to find him.
He says with a moan
That he'll soon come home,
Leaving his legs behind him.

“BRING ME MY BOW”

MISS ARMSTRONG. Oh well, I suppose she can't grumble. At least she'll get half a man—and there are lots of surplus women who won't get even that much.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. Of course he'll get a disability pension—and that ought to be enough for them to get married on. And really, the doctors do make such marvellous artificial legs nowadays that I don't think anyone can grumble.

MISS GOOSENS. Eight out of ten. Next!

[STELLA PROUT *appears*.]

STELLA.

Humpty-dumpty was hit by a shell.
Humpty-dumpty was blown to—bits.
All the king's doctors and medical men
Couldn't put Humpty-dumpty together again.

MISS ARMSTRONG. There you are, you see. Little Miss Nan was much better off with her man, even if he did leave his legs behind him. After all, half a man is better than no bed-fellow.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. There's no need to be coarse about it. She'll be well taken care of—a widow's pension and all that.

MISS GOOSENS. Besides—you know these things must be after a famous victory. Seven out of ten, Stella. Next!

[ELSIE HAVERGILL *appears*.]

ELSIE.

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
What does your garden grow?
I've crops of guns and bullets in tons
And crosses of wood in a row.

SYDNEY BOX

MISS ARMSTRONG. Now that's good! "Crosses of wood in a row." Tell me, Elsie, did you ever stop to think how many crosses of wood there are in a row?

ELSIE. No. How many, Miss Armstrong?

MISS ARMSTRONG [*a little wearily.*] You might as well know, I suppose. In the last war, Elsie, there were ten million crosses of wood in a row. In the next——

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. Oh, but don't you think we ought to count in all the other crosses, too? We don't want Elsie to run away with the idea that a cross of wood is all our brave soldiers get, do we?

MISS ARMSTRONG. Oh, no. Don't let's have any mistake about it.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. You see, Elsie, some soldiers get an iron cross; some get a bronze one; and some, if they're very brave, get a silver one. Then there are lots of lovely war memorial crosses for soldiers all over the place. [And if you're a soldier and you're very lucky, you might be elected the Unknown Warrior. That's a great honour—and somebody has to get the job, you know, so there's no reason why it shouldn't be you.¹]

ELSIE. I see, Lady Lettice. Thank you.

[*She bobs awkwardly as at the prize-giving.*]

MISS GOSENS. Eight out of ten. Next!

[CONSTANCE KENT *reappears.*]

By direction of the Lord Chamberlain, the words inside the brackets must be omitted from any public performance of the play.

“BRING ME MY BOW”

MARY [*speaking for the first time*]. That's not fair. She's had her turn already.

MISS GOOSENS. Have you got yours ready?

MARY. No.

MISS GOOSENS. Then get on with it and don't interrupt. Proceed, Constance.

CONSTANCE.

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe;
She had too many children because she didn't know
what to do.

Dictators first told her that children were wealth;
Then sent them to war for the good of their health.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. I protest! The whole thing is untrue and indecent.

MISS GOOSENS. I agree. Censored! Nought out of ten. Next!

[JOAN BERRY *reappears*.]

JOAN.

Baa, baa, Blackshirt, have you got a plan?

Yes, sir; yes, sir; a plan for every man.

First we'll kill the Jews, sir; and then we'll kill the
Reds;

And then the little Blackshirts can sleep safe in their
beds.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY [*loudly*]. I protest!
I——

MISS GOOSENS [*loudly*]. Censored. Nought out of
ten. Next!

[VERONICA, STELLA and ELSIE *reappear together and*

SYDNEY BOX

recite—or sing, if the producer prefers it—another nursery rhyme.]

VERONICA, STELLA, ELSIE [*together*].

Three blind men,

See how they go.

They used to be virile and active, these three;

They used to read books; they could look at a tree;

Till the war took their sight from them—now they
can't see;

They're three blind men.

[During this rhyme, three men, carrying white walking-sticks and wearing bandages over their eyes, or darkened glasses, enter S.L. and cross the stage slowly, each with his hand on the shoulder of the man in front, tapping with their sticks in time to the rhyme as they go.]

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY [*as if in the middle of a speech*]. At St. Dunstan's, ladies and gentlemen, the blinded men are cared for in the best manner possible. Of course they——

MISS ARMSTRONG [*breaking in as though she were continuing the same speech*]*—can't see water, or trees—*
or even a football match——

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY [*breaking in again*]*—*
but nowadays, what with Braille books and talking
books, and gramophones and radio, being blind isn't
nearly such an affliction as it used to be. I don't need
to remind you that men who were blinded in the war——

MISS ARMSTRONG—will never see the faces of their
dear ones again. Many have children whose faces
they have never seen. They have——

“BRING ME MY BOW”

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY—the duckiest little dogs to lead them around——

MISS ARMSTRONG—but they will never see again.

MISS GOSENS [*stiffing a yawn*]. Eight out of ten.
Next!

[*All of the girls, with the exception of MARY, join in the next rhyme.*]

CONSTANCE.

Ten little soldier boys, feeling fit and fine;
One got shell-shock, and then there were nine.

JOAN.

Nine little soldier boys, filing through a gate;
One got sniped at, and then there were eight.

VERONICA.

Eight little soldier boys, looking up at heaven;
One thought he saw a bomb. He did! And
there were seven.

STELLA.

Seven little soldier boys, in an awful fix;
One of them deserted and then there were six.

ELSIE.

Six little soldier boys, glad to be alive;
One caught enteric, and then there were five.

CONSTANCE.

Five little soldier boys, sick of ruddy war;
A raiding party captured one, and then there were
four.

JOAN.

Four little soldier boys, mud up to the knee;
One got trench feet, and then there were three.

SYDNEY BOX

VERONICA.

Three little soldier boys, wondering what to do;
One got a staff job, and then there were two.

STELLA.

Two little soldier boys, sitting in the sun;
One sniffed mustard gas, and then there was one.

ELSIE.

One little soldier boy, thought the war was won;
He starved without a job, and then there were
none.

LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY. But you can't blame the War Office if there aren't enough jobs to go round, can you? It's not their business, after all, is it?

MISS ARMSTRONG. Why of course not! You can't blame the War Office for anything.

MISS GOOSENS. Nine out of ten. Next! [*There is no reply.*]

Next! Mary! Are you ready?

MARY [*standing*]. Yes, Mother Goose, I'm ready.

MISS GOOSENS. Very well, proceed!

MARY. Who killed my father?

GIRLS.

"I", said the shell.

"I sent him to hell.

I killed your father."

MISS ARMSTRONG. Oh no! The shell sent him to hell all right, but the shell wasn't responsible. The shell came from a gun and somebody fired that gun.

“BRING ME MY BOW”

And somebody else ordered him to fire it. And somebody else declared war before that. And thousands of others cheered when he did it, and said that war was fine and courageous and natural and inevitable and justified. And they were the people who killed Mary's father! You! [*She points at* LADY CHAMPION-CHOLMONDELEY.]

And you! [*She points at* MISS GOOSENS.] And you and you and you and you! [*She points out towards the audience.*] You killed Mary's father! And, what's more, you will go on killing him—just as two thousand years ago you killed another Man who came to bring peace to the world—so long as hate and greed and nationalism are in your hearts. I tell you that not until there is economic sufficiency for everyone—and everyone means the *whole* world—the Germans and the Japs, as well as the British and the French; the negroes as well as the whites—not until the “haves” share their riches with the “have-nots”—not until men learn to love one another as much as they love themselves will the world be ready for peace—and safe for Mary and Mary's father.

MISS GOOSENS. Silence! This won't do. This won't do at all! Mary's rhyme isn't a nursery rhyme at all. You must do another one!

MARY. I won't.

[MISS GOOSENS *moves towards* MARY, *who quite naturally returns to her position in the chair, as this dialogue takes place*].

MISS GOOSENS. You'll do another at once.

MARY. I won't! I won't!

SYDNEY BOX

MISS GOOSENS [*leaning over her and shaking her*]. You will!

MARY. I won't!

MISS GOOSENS. You will!

MARY. I won't! I won't! I won't! I *won't!*
I WON'T!

[*During this speech, the lights dim out quickly. MARY's voice goes on in the darkness. Then the lights go up again to reveal MISS GOOSENS standing over MARY, shaking her by the shoulder. MARY is still asleep and murmuring "I won't!"*].

MISS GOOSENS. Mary! Wake up!

MARY [*sitting up suddenly*]. Oh!

MISS GOOSENS. What's the meaning of this?

MARY. I—I'm afraid I fell asleep.

MISS GOOSENS. I see. And did you finish your essay first?

MARY. No, Miss Goosens. I didn't start it. . . . And what's more I'm not going to start it.

MISS GOOSENS. Mary!

MARY. I won't write it—not if you offer me a dozen scholarships!

MISS GOOSENS. You realise what this means?

MARY. Perfectly! It means I'll have to go back and work in the laundry. But at least, Mother Goose, it'll be a clean job!

CURTAIN.

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

STUART READY

CHARACTERS

LANDLORD

CAPTAIN STANDISH

MERRIDEW

MRS. VANE

GILBERT WEIR

ELSIE WEIR

POLICE INSPECTOR

The George Hotel at Crewswoth in Sussex.

SCENE: This is the entrance hall to a small country hotel. The main door is to the L. of the wall at back. Another door, apparently leading to the bar, is well up left-hand [stage L.] wall. There is another door farther down-stage in the same wall, but this is not used during action. Small, low window in centre of wall at back. Fire burning in big brick fireplace in right-hand wall. Horsehair sofa under window. A medium-size table is placed R. centre, with an armchair and some small chairs nearby. Grandfather clock stands to R. of window, but this is not essential; an ordinary clock on mantelpiece would serve. It is nine o'clock in the evening, and winter. *had better where here*

The room is empty on rise of curtain. There is knocking *in the*

The terms for the performance of this play may be obtained from Steele's Play Bureau, 32 Haymarket, London, S.W.1, to whom all applications for permission should be made.

STUART READY *Edw. S.*

at the main door. Presently the LANDLORD appears from door up L. in answer. He is a shortish man of about sixty, with greying hair. He is coatless and wears an apron.

The man at the door is CAPTAIN STANDISH. He is well built, bronzed, and has a military bearing; he is about forty-five years of age.

STANDISH [coming in]. Good evening.

LANDLORD. 'Evening, sir. Not snowing now?

STANDISH. No; it's cleared. [Throwing hat and coat on a chair] Can I have a whisky-and-soda in here?

LANDLORD. Certainly.

STANDISH. I've left my car outside; I suppose it will be all right?

LANDLORD. Quite all right, sir.—Unless you wish to stay the night?

STANDISH. Oh, no; I'm expecting someone. I'll just hang on for half an hour or so. *wait*

LANDLORD. I'll get your drink.

[LANDLORD goes out by same door. STANDISH wanders idly about the room. Then he sits on sofa. The LANDLORD brings the drink.]

STANDISH. Where exactly is this place?

LANDLORD. Crewsworth, sir; only a village. Nearest place of any size is Colney. *John's murder.*

STANDISH [a little surprised]. Colney? Near here?

LANDLORD. Well, ten miles, but it's the biggest place between this and the coast.

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

STANDISH [*dismissing the subject*]. I see.

LANDLORD. Perhaps you'll ring if you want anything? [*Going*] Does your friend know this place? It's off the beaten track. *not in regular road*

STANDISH [*laughing slightly*]. I don't know. If he's not here in twenty minutes I shall clear. *It is out of the p...*

[*The LANDLORD goes out. STANDISH finishes his drink quickly, then again roams about the room. As he is peering out of the window a car is heard. MERRIDEW and MRS. VANE enter. MERRIDEW is about sixty, a rather shrivelled little business man. MRS. VANE is a smart, slightly vulgar woman-of-the-world. She has a frank, easy manner with her, and she is obviously quite well off. Both are wearing heavy coats, and MERRIDEW pulls off his fur driving gloves.*]

MERRIDEW. So this is "The George"?

MRS. VANE. My God, what a hole! Looked better from the outside. *depressed and unhappy*

MERRIDEW. I think I'll pull in the car a bit more [*Goes.*]

MRS. VANE. I'm beginning to be sorry I met that little man. Gave me a lift from the railway station. I mean, if I hadn't met him I should have packed it up. What's a pub doing stuck out here? *at the time of murder*

STANDISH. Haven't I met you before? *Foster*

MRS. VANE. Have you? [*Staring*] Why, yes—Captain—somebody.

STANDISH. Standish.

MRS. VANE. Of course! You were at the house party at Colney Lodge a few years back.

STUART READY

STANDISH. And the fellow who gave you the lift?

MRS. VANE. Merridew, a solicitor. Don't you remember?

STANDISH. H'm; quite a reunion. The world appears to be remarkably small.

MRS. VANE. Damned uncanny coincidence, I call it. How long ago is it?

STANDISH. The Foster affair? About three years.

MRS. VANE. My meeting Mr. Merridew brought it all back. Not that he seemed keen to talk about it.

[MERRIDEW *comes back.*]

MERRIDEW. There's another car stuck right in front of the drive. [*To STANDISH*] Oh, I beg your pardon; I suppose it's yours, sir.

MRS. VANE. You know Captain Standish, Mr. Merridew.

MERRIDEW. Well, well!

MRS. VANE. One or two more, together with the Coroner, and we might be back three years.

STANDISH [*abruptly*]. What brings you here?

[MRS. VANE *and* MERRIDEW *exchange glances.*]

MERRIDEW. Well; it's a little curious.

MRS. VANE. Mr. Merridew and I haven't met since the inquest; that's three years. Now look at that [*handing STANDISH a telegram*].

STANDISH [*reading*]. "Meet me at 'The George', Crewsworth, Sussex, nine thirty Monday night. L."

MRS. VANE. And if I tell you that Mr. Merridew has a telegram worded in exactly the same way——?

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

MERRIDEW [*uneasily*]. I don't like it. I'm a practical man, but when you consider——

MRS. VANE. Mr. Merridew was in London when he got the wire; I was in Winchester.

STANDISH [*handing back telegram*]. But who is this person you are going to meet?

MRS. VANE [*shrugging her shoulders*]. Ask me another; I know lots of Ls.

MERRIDEW. That's just it, so do I. I have a business deal with a man named Lorrimer of Hayward's Heath. Or it might be Lyle.

MRS. VANE. We won't go into that. Your L. isn't my L., I hope. [*To STANDISH*] Can't we get a drink? AUG

STANDISH. Of course. Shall I ring? mean a
upper

MRS. VANE. Do. I'm not stopping in this tumble-down shack for half an hour without a livener. broken be
↓ drink

[*STANDISH rings bell.*]

MERRIDEW. This is a sad occasion. I didn't need to be reminded of that. None wants to talk
that for
me
up to talk

MRS. VANE. Nor do we, so shut up. In half an hour we shall all be separating once again, so let's be matey whilst we are here.

[*LANDLORD enters.*]

LANDLORD. Good evening.

MERRIDEW. What will you drink?

MRS. VANE. No, it's on me; I owe you for the lift. Give me a double "Black and White", please. And you?

STUART READY

MERRIDEW. Well, perhaps a small glass of sherry.

MRS. VANE. Captain Standish?

STANDISH. Whisky, thanks; but really——

MRS. VANE. Tush; I'm in the chair. [*The LANDLORD goes to the door.*] Are you the Landlord?

LANDLORD. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. VANE. How far is Colney Lodge from here?

LANDLORD. About ten miles.

MRS. VANE. Thank you.

[LANDLORD goes.]

MERRIDEW. What did you want to ask him that for, Mrs. Vane?

MRS. VANE. Oh, I don't know. It strikes me as being more than curious that we three should be in a place only ten miles from the scene of the death of Colonel Foster.

MERRIDEW. Don't, please! Foster was an old and valued friend of mine, and that unhappy affair——

His mind is wandering
STANDISH [*impatiently*]. Well, it's all done with now, so why harp on it? It isn't right people should be reminded of things like that.

MRS. VANE [*quietly*]. Did they ever find out any more?

STANDISH. Nothing. The open verdict returned at the inquest has stood. At least, so I understand; I went to India just after.

MRS. VANE [*with a shudder*]. I shall never forget that night.

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

MERRIDEW. Nor shall I. And the pleasant evening we spent together, all happy and carefree! Verdict or no verdict, I have always believed it was murder.

MRS. VANE. Oh, nonsense.

STANDISH. I don't think so. After all, Foster's heart was known to be groggy, and India plays the devil with one's constitution.—Pleasant subject.

MRS. VANE [*looking at watch*]. Ten past nine. I don't stop a minute after half-past for all the letters in the alphabet. *men want to get the one*

MERRIDEW. We were silly to come on such a wild goose chase; but I hate to lose a possible client.

MRS. VANE [*suddenly*]. Captain Standish, what are you doing here, anyway?

STANDISH. Oh; I'm here by appointment too.

MERRIDEW. Not with——?

STANDISH. With a person who signs himself "L." My telegram's the same as yours.

MRS. VANE. I don't like the look of this.

MERRIDEW. It's a hoax. How could three persons——?

STANDISH. It's certainly queer. I happened to be stopping at the coast—reasonably near this place—or I should have ignored it.

MRS. VANE. Had you any idea who it could be?

STANDISH. No. I've many acquaintances who might sign themselves in that cryptical manner. I was curious, so I decided to run a few miles out of my road.

STUART READY

MRS. VANE. Well, I suppose we shall see. Then I presume you meet an old army pal, Mr. Merridew a business client, and I an old flame. How's that for convenience?

MERRIDEW [*shaking his head*]. It won't do. I don't really believe in the supernatural, but——

STANDISH [*curtly*]. Neither do I; and I'm not going to be frightened out of it. If it's a hoax, well, it's cost us a few drinks and some wasted time. If not [*he shrugs his shoulders*] we are curious to know what this person wants with all three of us.

MERRIDEW [*ruminating*]. Now I knew a man named Lewis who lived at Eastbourne——

[*LANDLORD enters with drinks.*]

LANDLORD [*to MERRIDEW*]. I didn't ask you, sir, if you and the lady would be stopping the night.

MERRIDEW. Good gracious! No; I have to be in London early to-morrow.

MRS. VANE. What's the weather like?

LANDLORD. Snowing heavily; it has threatened all day.

MRS. VANE. Good God! As if anything else were needed to make this place more desolate. I shall have to ask you to help me out of this, Mr. Merridew.

MERRIDEW. Certainly, certainly. [*To LANDLORD*] I suppose no one has made inquiries about us this evening? My name's Merridew.

LANDLORD. No, sir. You are expecting someone?

MERRIDEW. Yes. Oh, damn it, I suppose I am!

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

STANDISH. That's a car. [*They all listen.*]

MRS. VANE. Enter Mr. L! He has a car, so he can't be a ghost.

[*LANDLORD opens the door. MR. and MRS. WEIR, a young married couple, come in.*]

WEIR [*blinking in the light*]. Oh—hullo. This is "The George", Crewsworth, I suppose? I couldn't see the sign.

LANDLORD. This is "The George", sir.

WEIR. You are off the beaten track; I've been cruising round for miles trying to find the place. [*To his wife*] Go over to the fire, dear. [*ELSIE WEIR goes over to the fire and warms her hands.*] Cold night.

MERRIDEW. Snowing, I believe.

WEIR. Not half! Glad we struck you when we did, or we might have lost our bearings completely.

MRS. VANE [*in sudden agitation*]. Pardon me, young man, but what is your name?

WEIR. Weir, Gilbert Weir. That's my wife.

STANDISH. Good God! [*They all look at him.*] Don't you remember? Weir was at Colney.

LANDLORD [*at door*]. Perhaps you'll ring if you want anything? [*Goes out.*]

WEIR. That's right, and my wife; tho' we weren't married then. [*Looking at the others.*] And so were all of you!—everyone. Mrs. Vane—Captain Standish—Mr.——

MERRIDEW. Merridew.

STUART READY

ELSIE WEIR [*coming over*]. You don't mean that you have had telegrams like we have?

STANDISH. Like you?

WEIR. One each. Queer, too. You see, Elsie and I have only been married four months, and her telegram was addressed in her maiden name.

MERRIDEW. I'm not stopping any longer. There's something—something unearthly about it all. Or, if it's a hoax, I'm not going to be taken in.

MRS. VANE. Don't be a fool; of course you're taken in. We're all taken in. The only thing to do is to wait and see.

WEIR [*quietly*]. Are we anywhere near Colney Lodge?

STANDISH. Quite near.

WEIR. Phew! I thought it couldn't be far off. Funny coincidence that we——

MRS. VANE. Coincidence! It was pretty strange before you arrived. Now——!

WEIR. Let's get this right. We were all five of us guests at Colney Lodge at the time Colonel Foster was murdered——

MRS. VANE [*quickly*]. Who said he was murdered?

WEIR. Well, I admit the verdict was open; but I never believed——

MRS. VANE. You've no right to believe anything else. Death from natural causes.

MERRIDEW. No, no; an open verdict. That's not quite the same.

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

ELSIE WEIR. I don't like this place. Couldn't we go? We've no need to keep an appointment like this.

WEIR. Just as you like, dear; but we have come out of our way, haven't we? Now we are here, we might just as well see.

ELSIE WEIR [*she is a little unstrung*]. I don't like it! It's uncanny.

MRS. VANE. It's all that, my child.

STANDISH. I don't agree with you. The whole thing's a well-organised hoax.

MERRIDEW. Oh, no; impossible.

MRS. VANE. More likely Scotland Yard making a belated effort to reopen the proceedings.

STANDISH. Whatever it is, I'm seeing it through.

WEIR [*to his wife*]. Shall we stop?

ELSIE WEIR. All right. I'm not really frightened of anything, but it's all so strange.

WEIR. Then as a stranger give it welcome. [*Lighting a cigarette*] This is a cheerful party, if you like.

MERRIDEW [*testily*]. I suggest, sir, that you keep your breeziness to yourself. Colonel Foster was a very old friend of mine.

STANDISH [*impatiently*]. Oh, we know all that. Good heavens! Can't we be rational? Why should we assume that this thing—the wires—the place of meeting—our association three years ago—has any bearing on an incident that is forgotten and finished with?

STUART READY

MRS. VANE. That's true.

STANDISH. Could anything be more prosaic than this inn? Why should we bate our breath, as if we expected old Foster's ghost to appear?

ELSIE WEIR. Don't say things like that! It's beastly.

STANDISH. I'm sorry; no disrespect. I knew Colonel Foster very well indeed, and I was just as cut up as other people who made more of a snivel about it.

MERRIDEW. I hope you are not referring to me, sir?
[STANDISH *shrugs his shoulders and moves away.* The LANDLORD *enters to remove empty glasses.*]

MERRIDEW. I say—Do you remember the affair at Colney Lodge three years ago?

LANDLORD. Yes, sir; I remember it. Colonel Foster was found dead in bed.

ELSIE WEIR. Is this necessary?

MERRIDEW. Is it still talked about?

LANDLORD. I don't think so. The verdict was open, but there were no real suspicions of foul play.

MERRIDEW. Of course not.

MRS. VANE. Did you know Colonel Foster?

LANDLORD. Very well, ma'am. Did you?

MRS. VANE. Yes; as a matter of fact——

WEIR [*breaking in*]. Thank you, landlord. [LANDLORD *goes.*] I don't think we need air our private affairs to everybody.

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

MRS. VANE. Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sure. Everyone seems so touchy.

WEIR. We want to forget it, if we can. Elsie had a very bad shock at the time, and if it hadn't been for that confounded telegram——

MRS. VANE. I know; it cut me up too. We had been friends for years. I don't think it's generally known, but he and I were once engaged!

MERRIDEW. Indeed?

MRS. VANE [*shortly*]. We quarrelled, and it was broken off. That's all.

MERRIDEW. Despite what that fellow said, I don't believe public opinion was ever quite satisfied he died naturally.

WEIR. What was that story of an old Australian friend who swore he would track down the murderer?

MRS. VANE. I don't remember that.

STANDISH. That's right, there was a man—his partner for years in the Bush. He was drowned on his way to England.

MERRIDEW. Drowned? Ah, yes; I remember. But what right had he to believe one way or the other?

STANDISH. I don't know. Apparently he sailed for England vowing vengeance, but he didn't live to do anything.

MRS. VANE. The weak point in any question of murder is the absence of motive. People don't kill one another for fun.

STUART READY

WEIR. There was no possible motive.

STANDISH. I don't know about that.

MRS. VANE. Surely——?

STANDISH. Colonel Foster was not a poor man.

ELSIE WEIR [*heatedly*]. I hope you don't mean anything by that remark?

WEIR. Look here, Captain Standish; it may interest you to know that my wife was one of the chief legatees under Colonel Foster's will. By God, if you dare to suggest!——

STANDISH. Don't be a fool.

MRS. VANE. Might as well put me under suspicion because he once jilted—— [*she coughs and breaks off hurriedly*].

MERRIDEW. Absurd, absurd.

STANDISH. No one's suggesting anything. What about me? If anyone had a right to feel ill disposed towards Foster, I had.

WEIR. You were in India with him, weren't you?

STANDISH. I was; he was the commanding officer of my battalion. During that time I was engaged to the daughter of the Governor of the Province we were in. We were very much in love. Then Foster came along. He promised to leave me ten thousand pounds in his will if I—well, if I stood down. I agreed, and he married the girl.

MERRIDEW. I don't remember your being a legatee.

STANDISH. That's just it; I wasn't. [*Lighting a cigarette*] And yet I didn't kill him.

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

WEIR. Phew! That was pretty tough.

ELSIE WEIR. I should say you were justly served.

STANDISH. Thanks. Well, who's next? Mr. Merridew handled the Colonel's business affairs. Can't we find a motive there?

MERRIDEW [*laughing it off*]. How ridiculous!

MRS. VANE. This is getting us down. [*Looks at watch.*] Twenty past. Let's have another drink or we shall be blacking each other's eyes.

STANDISH [*going to bell*]. All right; this is mine. [*Looking out of window*] By gad, it's like a blanket!

MRS. VANE. We shall have to stay the night, you may depend.

ELSIE WEIR. Oh, I couldn't! Gilbert, I can't stop in this place.

WEIR. All right, dear, we won't. Do sit down, and don't worry about it.

MRS. VANE. Nerves. I'm just the same.

[*Enter LANDLORD.*]

STANDISH. Well? Mrs. Weir? [*She shakes her head.*]

WEIR. Not for us, thanks. Oh, all right; I'll have a whisky.

STANDISH. Mrs. Vane?

MRS. VANE. And me.

STANDISH. Whisky for you, Merridew?

MERRIDEW. Dear me, no; if I start mixing drinks —! If I must have something, give me another glass of sherry.

STUART READY

STANDISH [*to* LANDLORD]. Sherry and three whiskies.

LANDLORD. Very good, sir.

MRS. VANE. Can you put us up if the snow continues?

LANDLORD. Yes, ma'am; I think it could be managed.

[LANDLORD *goes out.*]

WEIR [*to* STANDISH]. I'm sorry I let fly at you.

STANDISH. That's all right.

WEIR. It isn't as if it were the first time we've endured unpleasant suggestions.

MERRIDEW. You mean that other people——?

ELSIE WEIR. Many others. Because he left me some money—— [*In a sudden outburst*] Do you think I could do a thing like that?

WEIR. Elsie! Please.

MRS. VANE. I'm sure no one would dream of such a thing.

STANDISH [*impatiently*]. Do what? The whole thing was mostly newspaper talk. There's always an inquest when anyone dies suddenly in such circumstances. Was he shot? Strangled?

MERRIDEW. What about poison?

WEIR. That was dismissed at the inquest.

MERRIDEW. Some poisons cannot be traced. There is a South American poison—and I remember hearing of a case in India——

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

MRS. VANE. Mr. Merridew, I hope you haven't forgotten Captain Standish has been in India.

STANDISH [*drily*]. Thank you.

MERRIDEW. Dear me, I beg your pardon; I was merely citing an instance.

STANDISH. Oh, you can cite what you damn well like.

[LANDLORD *enters with drinks, placing the tray on the table. STANDISH pays him, and the LANDLORD goes out. STANDISH hands drinks to MRS. VANE, WEIR and MERRIDEW fetch their own. There is one glass left on the tray.*]

STANDISH. Here's a toast: May we never meet again.

MERRIDEW. Ah!

ELSIE WEIR [*suddenly*]. Oh!

WEIR [*a little annoyed*]. What is the matter?

ELSIE WEIR. This reminds me—at Colney the night before Colonel Foster died. Don't you remember? We were in the drawing-room, and he ordered drinks for us all.

MRS. VANE. Bless the girl, what a disagreeable memory!

MERRIDEW. Quite right. But I wasn't drinking sherry.

STANDISH. No; liqueurs, weren't they?

WEIR. The Colonel had something unusual. What was that queer drink he was so fond of? Absinthe?

MRS. VANE. Yes, absinthe.

STUART READY

MERRIDEW. How merry we were that evening; and to think that the next morning——!

MRS. VANE. If I have to spend the night in this place!

WEIR. Oh, do, for goodness' sake, let's change the subject. We have had enough of that.

MERRIDEW. I suggest a game of cards.

MRS. VANE. Cards? It's now twenty-five past nine. At half-past I either get into that car of yours, or I go straight to the rickety bed that's waiting for me upstairs.

ELSIE WEIR [*moving towards the door*]. Let's go, dear. We've waited long enough. [*To the others*] Suppose we all go together?

WEIR. What do you say?

STANDISH. If you like. We can hang together till we reach the main road.

MRS. VANE. I think we should wait until half-past. After all, we came because of the telegrams.

ELSIE [*nervously*]. No; let's go now!

WEIR. All right; we'll go, anyway. [*Finishing his drink*] Who's drink is this? [*He points to glass on tray.*]

STANDISH. Not mine.

MERRIDEW [*indicating the mantelpiece*]. My glass is over there.

MRS. VANE. Someone hasn't touched theirs [*going to mirror.*]

WEIR. Surely——?

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

MRS. VANE. That's not whisky [*arranging hat.*]

WEIR [*sniffing at glass*]. Absinthe.

MERRIDEW [*after a silence*]. Who ordered that? [*To STANDISH*] You? [*STANDISH shakes his head.*]

ELSIE WEIR. I can't stand much more of this.

STANDISH. Did anyone order that—for a joke? For God's sake——!

MERRIDEW. Who says coincidence now? Isn't this Colney Lodge three years ago? The five of us, just as we were, and——

MRS. VANE. Hadn't we better pull ourselves together?

STANDISH. The thing's absurd.

ELSIE WEIR. No, no! It's something more than that. [*Becoming hysterical*] Somebody knows—there is a murderer among us!

WEIR [*going to her*]. Steady, girl!

MERRIDEW. My dear, don't be foolish.

ELSIE. You all know it! I can see it in your faces.

STANDISH. Is this the twentieth century? Let's be a little practical.

MRS. VANE. You're right; this sort of talk is going to do us no good. I'm ready to go, snow or no snow.

MERRIDEW. One moment! [*They stop their preparations for departure and look at him.*] Someone was speaking of Foster's friend in Australia. Does anyone remember his name?

WEIR. No.

STUART READY

STANDISH. Does that matter? Leave the thing alone and clear!

WEIR. Come along, Elsie. [*The WEIRS are at the door.*]

MERRIDEW [*slowly*]. The name was—Larner. [*All are rooted.*]

MRS. VANE [*in a hushed voice*]. Larner?

MERRIDEW. The telegrams—Foster's friend, alive or dead, has summoned us to this place.

WEIR. What's the time?

STANDISH. Half-past nine—gone. He's not punctual, anyway.

MERRIDEW [*hurrying to door*]. Then let us go—now.

ELSIE WEIR [*suddenly*]. Wait! There is someone outside.

[*They all listen. Then there is a determined knocking at the outer door.*]

MRS. VANE [*after some seconds of silence*]. Well; hadn't someone better open the door?

WEIR [*hesitating*]. All right.

ELSIE WEIR. Gilbert!

[*WEIR throws open the door. On the threshold is a police inspector.*]

INSPECTOR. Good evening. [*He enters and looks round.*]

MRS. VANE. Who are you?

INSPECTOR. Inspector Baird of this division. I happened to be passing here with a mobile man when

FIVE AT "THE GEORGE"

I saw the lights. What does it mean? [*There is an air of relief.*]

STANDISH. In what way?

WEIR. If it's my car lights——?

INSPECTOR [*drily*]. Plenty of cars outside, certainly. Quite a roadhouse scene; but can you all explain your presence in this inn?

MRS. VANE. What are you talking about? Is it a crime to call at an hotel?

INSPECTOR. This one, yes; it happens to be up for sale. It's been closed for three weeks; yet when I pass it at half-past nine at night I find it blazing with lights. A bad case of trespass, ladies and gentlemen.

WEIR. What damned rot! If we're trespassing, so's the landlord.

INSPECTOR. What landlord?

MERRIDEW. You don't suppose we helped ourselves to these drinks, do you?

INSPECTOR [*going across and examining table*]. H'm. There is no landlord; he left here three weeks ago, and the place has stood empty since.

MRS. VANE [*heatedly*]. You can call us liars if you like, but——

MERRIDEW. He came through that door not ten minutes ago.

INSPECTOR [*looking round*]. That door? See if he's there, will you, sir?

[MERRIDEW goes across to the door and opens it.]

STUART READY

INSPECTOR. Well?

MERRIDEW [*returning slowly, a bewildered expression on his face*]. There is no outlet; it is only a cupboard!

WEIR [*awed*]. My God! What are we up against?

ELSIE WEIR. It was Lerner—it was! Death was no barrier to him.

INSPECTOR. Well, if you people are ready to follow me to the station, we'll go into this matter.

[*The INSPECTOR idly examines the drink left on the table, sniffs it, and then raises the glass to his lips.*]

MRS. VANE [*with a sigh*]. All very mystifying, but does it prove anything? What's it all for?

[*Suddenly STANDISH observes the INSPECTOR's action. With a sudden impulsive movement of forgetfulness he rushes forward and holds out his hand.*]

STANDISH. Don't drink that! [*The INSPECTOR hesitates.*] It's poison!—It killed Foster!—I tell you it killed Foster!

[*Then realising what he has revealed, STANDISH crouches back against the wall, guilt written in his face. The others stare at him in horror.*]

CURTAIN

*Boombleshardt
peter a young farmer
sergeant klooque
Boombleshardt a miser
jacques
Martha
Land lady of
the three pigeons
pipette
niece*

CREATURES OF IMPULSE¹

A MUSICAL FAIRY PLAY

W. S. GILBERT

peter

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SERGEANT KLOOQUE

BOOMBLEHARDT, *a Miser*

PETER, *a Young Farmer*

JACQUES, *a Villager*

MARTHA, *Landlady of "The Three Pigeons"*

PIPETTE, *her Niece*

A STRANGE OLD LADY

VILLAGERS, ETC.

Costumes—Alsatian

SCENE. Exterior of "The Three Pigeons", a Country Inn; entrance to inn, R.; entrance through gate, C.

JACQUES and VILLAGERS discovered.

OPENING CHORUS.

Did you ever know a lady
So particularly shady,
Though a very nice old party she was thought to be?

The terms for the performance of this play may be obtained from Miss Nancy McIntosh, 4 Wellington Court, Knightsbridge, London, S.W.1, to whom all applications for permission should be made.

¹First performed at the Royal Court Theatre (under the management of Miss M. Litton) on 2nd April 1871.

I could see upon my honour,
When I first set eyes upon her,
That she wasn't any better than she ought to be.

[Enter BOOMBLEHARDT, L., with a very large bag of gold—they shake hands with him.]

BOOMBLEHARDT. I give you good morning, ladies.
I give you good morning, Peter.

JACQUES. What, for nothing?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, I don't charge for it.

FIRST VILLAGER. Why, Master Boumblehardt, you're getting liberal in your old age.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, my dear, yes—he's but a churl that keeps all his happiness to himself. It's a lovely day! the very trees are waving their long arms in ecstasy at the bright blue sky above them, and the bright green fields below them; and the pretty little birds are carolling a hymn of gratitude from their very topmost branches. It is indeed a good morning, and I give it you—I give it you!

JACQUES. You've got some more happiness in that long bag of yours, if one may judge by the chink of it. Can't you spare some of that?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Ha, ha! Do you know what that is? It's go-o-o-old!

SECOND VILLAGER. All gold?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, my dear, all go-o-o-old! It's my poor little rents that I've been collecting.

FIRST VILLAGER. And are going to keep it all yourself?

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

BOOMBLEHARDT. No, no, I'm not so bad as that! I'm going to give you a little treat with it—a little treat.

ALL. A treat!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, my dears, a treat! Have you any money of your own?

SECOND VILLAGER. Not a penny.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Not a penny? Very good. The greatest pleasure in this world is the possession of money. Now that is a pleasure you can't have, because you don't possess any. The next greatest pleasure is looking at other people's money, and it's in my power to give you that pleasure, and shall I grudge it to you? No! See! [*Handling gold.*] Isn't it pretty! It's all go-o-o-old! Real golden guineas!

ALL. Oh, shabby, shabby!

BOOMBLEHARDT. There's gratitude for you! Well, it's the way of the world; but, do what I will, I cannot please people. Where's Mistress Martha?

[*Enter PETER.*]

PETER. She's inside, trying to induce her strange old lady to go.

BOOMBLEHARDT. What strange old lady?

PETER. Why, a wicked old woman who has been staying at the "Three Pigeons" for the last six weeks. She won't pay any rent, and she won't go; but here comes Martha—she'll tell you all about it.

[*Enter MARTHA, from inn, very angry.*]

MARTHA. Well, it's no use, she won't budge.

W. S. GILBERT

BOOMBLEHARDT. How de do, Mistress Martha, I give you good morning. I've been collecting my rents, and I want a room at the "Three Pigeons" to-night.

MARTHA. Do you? Then you can't have one.
[*Sitting.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Can't have one?

MARTHA. No. Unless my strange old lady turns out. And she won't!

FIRST VILLAGER. But why don't you seize her baggage?

MARTHA. She hasn't got any.

SECOND VILLAGER. Stop her food, then!

MARTHA. I have, and she doesn't mind that. She's eaten nothing at all for three weeks.

THIRD VILLAGER. Nothing at all for three weeks?

MARTHA. Nothing whatever!

THIRD VILLAGER. Why, she'll be starved!

MARTHA. No; she says she never felt better in her life. She says that food always disagrees with her!

PETER. It disagrees with me sometimes, but I take it for all that!

FIRST VILLAGER. Why don't you turn her out neck and crop?

MARTHA. Turn out a woman who can live on nothing for three weeks? Why, she's a fairy! She'd be in again through the keyhole in a twinkling!

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

PETER. I know how to prevent that.

MARTHA. How?

PETER. Stuff up the keyhole.

MARTHA. Peter, you're a goose.

[*Enter* PIPETTE, *running from L. U. E.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, aunt, aunt! I've such news for you! [*Sees VILLAGERS*] Oh, I didn't know anybody was here. Oh, I beg your pardon! Oh, gracious! Oh, how extremely awkward!

MARTHA. Why, what's the matter with the girl?

PIPETTE. Oh, I'm so confused!

MARTHA. Why, what has confused you?

PIPETTE. Oh, it's all these people! Oh, please go away! Oh, I can't bear people! *She answers them - loud*

BOOMBLEHARDT. Why, bless the girl, how shy she is!

MARTHA. Shy! There isn't a greater donkey in the country. Why, there's a portrait of her great grandfather in her bedroom, and she always turns its face to the wall before she does her hair.

PIPETTE. Well, I've been properly brought up. A young girl can't be too particular.

PETER. But what has happened?

PIPETTE. Oh, I can't tell you before all these people! Oh, please send them away!

FIRST VILLAGER. Oh, I'm sure if we're in the way—[*Exit into inn.*]

SECOND VILLAGER. If it's very improper, we

W. S. GILBERT

wouldn't hear it for the world. But I dare say Mr. Boumblehardt and Peter won't mind. [*Exit into inn.*]

THIRD VILLAGER. Put it to them as delicately as you can, Jenny. A young girl can't be too particular. [*Exit into inn.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Well, now that they're gone, what is it? If it's imperence, whisper!

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please it's a sergeant, and he's coming here!

MARTHA. A sergeant! Well, and what is there to blush at in that?

PIPETTE. Oh, but he's such a long sergeant! You can't think what a long sergeant he is! And oh, if you please, he's got a moustache and all sorts of dreadful things.

MARTHA. A sergeant? It must be the famous Sergeant Klooque, who distinguished himself at Johannesburg—he's the bravest soldier in His Majesty's service. This is his native village, and he wrote to me to say that he would be here in the course of the week—on furlough. He's going to make the "Three Pigeons" his headquarters.

PIPETTE. A live sergeant coming to stop with us?

MARTHA. Certainly.

PIPETTE. Oh, then, if you please, and if it's quite convenient, I should like to retire from the world and go into a monastery.

MARTHA. A monastery? So should I.

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I mean a nunnery.

PETER. A nunnery? So should I.

MARTHA. Nonsense; stop here and welcome the brave gentleman, and if you don't do it well you shall marry Peter to-morrow. Now, Master Boombledhardt, if you'll step into the house we'll see what we can do for you.

BOOMBLEHARDT. By all means. Allow me to present you with——

MARTHA. With what, for gracious sake?

BOOMBLEHARDT. My arm.

[*Exeunt BOOMBLEHARDT and MARTHA into the house.*]

PIPETTE [*crying*]. Oh dear, oh dear, what shall I do? I don't know how to welcome a brave gentleman.

PETER. Don't welcome him.

PIPETTE. But if I don't I shall have to marry you to-morrow.

PETER. Never mind—it'll serve me right.

PIPETTE. But I hate brave gentlemen.

PETER. But I am not a brave gentleman.

PIPETTE. You? You're the greatest coward between this and Trent.

PETER. I *am* a coward.

PIPETTE. I hate a brave gentleman, but I detest a coward.

PETER. All men are cowards.

W. S. GILBERT

PIPETTE. What? Jacques Bonpré, who gave you that thrashing at Bontemps fair, and Pierre Pontoise who tied you on your horse wrong side before, for trotting over his turnips? And Jean Leroux, who dragged you through a horse pond for plundering his egg-roosts?

PETER. All cowards? I've a theory about that. In danger, all men are equally frightened, but some men have the power of concealing their fears—others haven't. I'm one of those who haven't. Some men are afraid to own that they are frightened—other men are not. I'm one of those who are not.

PIPETTE. Well, at all events Sergeant Klooque is a brave man, and I advise you to be civil to him. Oh dear, oh dear, what shall I do? How I do hate a man!

PETER. So do I.

PIPETTE. Oh, how I wish the world was full of women!

PETER. So do I.

PIPETTE. Now, I'm not at all afraid of women.

PETER. No more am I.

PIPETTE. I like women.

PETER. So do I!

PIPETTE. But men are so-so-so——

PETER. Oh, they are——

PIPETTE. What?

PETER. So-so. Very so-so.

PIPETTE. I mean they are so fond of staring at one,

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

and putting their arms round one's waist, and squeezing one's hand.

PETER. Yes, it's their way. I've done it myself.

PIPETTE. They wink too.

PETER. Yes, they would.

PIPETTE. Now, women never wink at me. They let me alone.

PETER. They let me alone, too, worse luck.

PIPETTE. You can say what you like to a woman—at least I mean I can. But I can't even look at a man.

PETER. You can look at me.

PIPETTE. I don't call you a man.

PETER. Well, don't call *him* a man, and then you can say what you like to him. He won't mind it.

PIPETTE. That's impudent.

PETER. It's meant to be.

PIPETTE. If you want to be impudent, why don't you be impudent to a man?

PETER. Oh, I should be a fool! Why, he'd box my ears!

PIPETTE. And you pretend to love me!

PETER. Exactly—I pretend to love you. That's all. It amuses you and gratifies me. [*Aside*] I'll show her that she's not going to ride rough-shod over me! [*Aloud*] You've got my snug little farm in your eye.

PIPETTE. Peter!

PETER. Well?

W. S. GILBERT

PIPETTE. Peter, you're a pig!

PETER. A pig?

PIPETTE. A pig!

PETER. Then you've got my snug little sty in your eye!

[Enter SERGEANT KLOOQUE.]

SERGEANT. Young lady, I salute you! The hero of Johannesberg salutes you!

PIPETTE. Oh, my goodness, he's going to salute me! Peter, if he salutes me, I'll scream!

SERGEANT. The young lady appears alarmed?

PETER. The young lady is very shy.

SERGEANT. Shy?

PETER. Yes. You soldiers are such disreputable dogs.

PIPETTE. Oh, yes, if you please, sir, you soldiers are such disreputable dogs! Oh, if you please, I didn't mean that! Oh, my! What a dreadful thing to have said!

SERGEANT. Some soldiers are—but not the Hussars of the King's Body Guard. Our Colonel is extremely particular.

SERGEANT. A soldier of the King's Hussars,
Although a gallant son of Mars;
To no one may he be gallant,
Except his mother and his aunt!

ALL. Except his mother and his aunt!

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

PIPETTE. A very proper rule indeed,
And one that surely should succeed.

PETER. But don't you find it rather slow—
Monotonous, in fact?

SERGEANT. Oh, no!
Each warrior who joins our corps
Can count his mothers by the score;
And as for aunts—as I'm alive—
Each grenadier has thirty-five!

ALL. Each grenadier has thirty-five!

PETER. I shouldn't like to serve with him;
One's aunts are elderly and grim.

PIPETTE. One's mothers too, as facts will show,
Are always aged dames.

SERGEANT. Oh, no!
The grimmest aunt in all our corps
Is seventeen—or little more;
The oldest mother's age may be
A little short of twenty-three!

Ensemble.

PETER AND PIPETTE.
Oh, Sergeant, I begin to take!
I'm much afraid that you're a rake!

SERGEANT. My meaning they begin to take,
It's pretty clear that I'm a rake!

[Enter MARTHA from inn.]

MARTHA. Sergeant Klooque, as I'm alive.

SERGEANT. Mistress Martha! Why, how pretty
you're grown!

W. S. GILBERT

MARTHA. This is indeed a distinction you have conferred on us!

PIPETTE. Oh!

MARTHA. Well, what's the matter with the girl?

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I was thinking that the sergeant has had so many distinctions conferred on him, that he can afford to spare us one. Oh, if you please, I didn't mean that. Oh, dear, what have I said!

MARTHA. And what a big man you've grown. Why, you were a little drummer boy when you left us, and now you're a gigantic sergeant!

SERGEANT. Yes, I've risen in the service.

PETER. And some day, I suppose, you'll be an officer?

SERGEANT. Yes—but that will be a long time first.

PIPETTE. Oh!

ALL. Well?

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I was thinking, if you're six foot long as a sergeant, how long will you be before you're a captain? Oh, if you please, I didn't mean that! Oh my! I wish I hadn't spoken.

MARTHA. Pipette, you're a goose. [*To SERGEANT*] But we're very glad to see you, and I hope you'll make the "Three Pigeons" your home as long as your furlough lasts.

SERGEANT. With pleasure, Martha. I've been roughing for the last six months, and it's no little treat

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

to look forward to six weeks' holiday in a pretty inn, in a pretty village, with a pretty landlady to look after one's wants. [*Puts his arm round her waist.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, aunt, perhaps your son would like to see his room.

MARTHA. My son?

PIPETTE. Your nephew, then?

MARTHA. My nephew?

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I thought he must be one or the other, as his Colonel is very strict, and only allows his soldiers to kiss their mothers or their aunts. Oh dear, I wish I hadn't said that! Oh my! what a dreadful thing to have said!

SERGEANT. When a soldier is on furlough, discipline is relaxed. [*Kisses MARTHA.*] But why are you sighing?

MARTHA. I'm thinking of my old lady. She won't pay my rent, and she's eaten nothing and drunk nothing for a fortnight, and she looks as plump as ever. [*Mysteriously*] She's a fairy!

PETER. Bah!

MARTHA. Eh?

PETER. Stuff! I don't believe it.

MARTHA. And why?

PETER. Fairies do everything with a wand, don't they?

MARTHA. Well?

W. S. GILBERT

PETER. Well, she cleans her teeth with a toothbrush—
—I've seen her.

MARTHA. Peter, you're a goose!

PIPETTE. I say, Peter.

PETER. Well?

PIPETTE. It'll be a bad look-out for you and me
about Michaelmas!

SERGEANT. Suppose we tackle the old lady by turns.

MARTHA. Ah, but who'll begin?

PETER [*boldly*]. I will. *Supposed to ward*

ALL. You!

PETER. I. She's no more a fairy than I am—she's
an ugly old woman, and I'd rather tackle one ugly
old woman than a dozen handsome men. Afraid of
an old woman! Why, the older they are the less I fear
'em!

[*Exeunt* PIPETTE, MARTHA, and SERGEANT, to
house, R.]

[*Enter* OLD LADY, C.]

PETER. Now for it. I say, old lady!

OLD LADY. Well, young man?

PETER. I've a bone to pick with you.

OLD LADY. Can't stop, my time's valuable.

PETER. Oh, but you must!

OLD LADY. Must, eh?

PETER. Do you see that? [*Showing his arm*] Feel it.

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

OLD LADY. Mercy, what a ridiculous little arm!

PETER [*pointing to biceps*]. Do you know what that is?

OLD LADY. Well, I can guess!

PETER. What is it?

OLD LADY. I suppose it's the bone you're going to pick with me. We may spare ourselves the trouble—there's very little on it.

PETER [*in a rage*]. I say, I'm not accustomed to stand that sort of thing from a woman of your age, you know.

OLD LADY. Do you know my age?

PETER. About eighty, I should say. [*Aside*] That'll put her back up!

OLD LADY. Eighty! Nonsense, I'm eight hundred and forty-two.

PETER. Well, you don't look it.

OLD LADY. Peter, you're a dangerous little man!

PETER. I am a dangerous little man as you'll discover. Now, look here, ma'am.

OLD LADY. I'm all attention, Peter!

PETER. You've been here six weeks.

OLD LADY. True.

PETER. You've paid no rent.

OLD LADY. None.

PETER. You don't mean to pay any.

OLD LADY. Not a penny.

PETER. You don't eat anything.

OLD LADY. Nothing.

PETER. You don't drink anything.

OLD LADY. Not a drop.

PETER. And if you did you wouldn't pay for it.

OLD LADY. Not a penny.

PETER. Now hasn't it occurred to you that on the whole you're not a profitable customer?

OLD LADY. Yes, that reflection has occurred to me. But look at it from my point of view. If you could get all you wanted from a first-rate inn without paying for it, how long would you stop there?

PETER. I should stop there until somebody did to me what I'm going to do to you.

OLD LADY. What's that?

PETER. Turn you out. Come—trundle—toddle—vanish!

[He squares up to her as if about to strike her.]

OLD LADY. Why, Peter, would you strike an old woman?

PETER. Why not? You're as big as I am. Besides you've less to lose. You are very ugly, and no amount of thrashing would make you uglier than you are. Now I am very beautiful, and a tap on the nose would play the very deuce with me! Come—toddle.

[Squares up at her.]

OLD LADY. Very well, Peter, you're a coward to square up at an old woman, and as a punishment you will be so good as to go on squaring up to every one

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

you meet and telling them to "Come on!" until further notice.

PETER. What, squaring up like this? [*Squaring*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Yes, just like that.

PETER. What, at everybody I come across? [*Squaring*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Yes, at everybody you come across.

PETER. Big and little! [*Squaring*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Yes, big and little.

PETER [*howling*]. But they won't like it. [*Squaring*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Not a bit.

PETER. They'll hit me back! Come on!

OLD LADY. I hope so.

PETER [*squaring very fiercely and hitting out right and left, and howling all the time*]. Oh, please don't make me go on squaring at every one like this. Come on!

OLD LADY. Must be done, Peter!

PETER. But here's the sergeant coming. Must I square up to him? He's six feet high. Come on!

OLD LADY. That's unlucky; but it must be done.

PETER. I think I'll go. Come on!

OLD LADY. I think you'd better.

[PETER goes off, squaring, hitting out violently and crying out, "Come on!"

W. S. GILBERT

Enter SERGEANT, from inn, and stares at him in astonishment.]

SERGEANT. Is the young man unwell?

OLD LADY. No, he's quite well. He's practising his boxing.

SERGEANT. What for?

OLD LADY. He says you flirt with Pipette, and he's going to give you a thrashing.

SERGEANT. Ho, ho, ho! Now, my dear little old lady, I'm going to beg a favour of you.

OLD LADY. Go away, soldier chap, I hate soldier chaps! Do you know what effect a red coat has on me? It drives me mad.

SERGEANT. You're not the only lady it affects in that way. I've brought you a message from Mistress Martha. She wants you to go.

OLD LADY. Go?

SERGEANT. Go! Come, old lady [*Puts his arm round her waist*], be reasonable.

OLD LADY. Go away, soldier! I hate soldiers. Go away! [*Strikes at him with her crutch.*]

SERGEANT. I say—gently, old lady! [*Ducking to avoid crutch.*]

OLD LADY. Go away, I say! You're a dissipated fellow to dare to put your arms round an unprotected woman's waist! You wouldn't do it if my papa were here! [*Thrashes him with crutch.*]

SERGEANT. Confound it, ma'am; your stick hurts! [*Ducking.*] Don't, ma'am, don't! [*Ducks.*] Don't, I say! [*Ducks.*]

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

OLD LADY. And as a punishment for your impertinence, you will be so good as to go on ducking and dodging, and saying "don't!" to every one you meet, until further notice.

SERGEANT. What, like this? [*Ducking*] Don't!

OLD LADY. Yes, like that.

SERGEANT. But they'll think I'm afraid of 'em! [*Ducking*] Don't!

OLD LADY. Sure to!

SERGEANT. But I'm not afraid of any one. Don't!

OLD LADY. No, you are the bravest man in the army!

SERGEANT. I shall lose my reputation. I shall be branded as a coward! Don't!

[*Enter PIPETTE from inn; she stares at SERGEANT in astonishment.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, Mistress Martha's compliments, and have you been successful?

SERGEANT. No, she won't go! [*Ducking*] Don't!

PIPETTE. I wasn't going to. Oh! if you please, what's the matter?

SERGEANT. Oh, it's nothing! It'll pass off. [*Ducking*] Don't!

PIPETTE. Wouldn't you like to lie down? I'm not going to hurt you.

SERGEANT. No, no, my dear, I'm quite well. [*Ducking*] Don't!

PIPETTE. It's your fun, I suppose?

W. S. GILBERT

SERGEANT. Exactly. It's my fun! [*Ducking*].

OLD LADY. He's showing you how he fought the enemy at Johannesburg.

SERGEANT. No, my dear! I'm showing you how the enemy fought us. This is the way they retreated. Don't! don't! don't!

[*Exit SERGEANT, ducking and backing.*]

PIPETTE. What a strange young man.

OLD LADY. He's a very rude young man.

PIPETTE. Rude?

OLD LADY. Yes. He put his arm round my waist.

PIPETTE. Are you his mother?

OLD LADY. No, my dear, I'm not.

PIPETTE. Nor his aunt?

OLD LADY. No.

PIPETTE. Then I'll tell his Colonel, and he'll be flogged!

OLD LADY. I should like to see him flogged.

PIPETTE. So should I! Oh my, what am I saying? Oh dear, I didn't mean that!

OLD LADY. Well, my dear, and what do you want?

PIPETTE. I want to ask you a great—great favour.

OLD LADY. Yes?

PIPETTE. You're such a dear old lady, that I'm sure you'll grant it.

OLD LADY. Yes, I'm a pleasant old person.

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

PIPETTE. Although you're past your prime, you've such bright eyes, and such red cheeks, and such a happy expression of countenance, that you're prettier than many a young girl I know.

OLD LADY. Yes, I'm attractive—attractive, nothing more?

PIPETTE. Well, you're such a dear old lady, and I'm so fond of you, and you've made yourself so pleasant and so agreeable, that what I want you to do is to—is to——

OLD LADY. Yes, is to—is to?

PIPETTE. Is to go.

OLD LADY. Go?

PIPETTE. Go. You see, they don't appreciate you as much as I do. I think you're a dear old lady—perhaps the dearest old lady I ever saw, but they don't.

OLD LADY. Oh, they don't?

PIPETTE. No, I can't understand it, but it is so. Now, I'm sure you're too proud—too noble—too high-spirited to remain where you're not wanted. Aren't you, you dear—dear old lady? [*Kisses her.*] Oh, I declare I could kiss those cherry cheeks all day long!

OLD LADY. All day long?

PIPETTE. All day long! [*Kisses her.*]

OLD LADY. Very good—you're telling stories, my dear, and must be punished. As a punishment you will be so good as to go about offering to kiss and fondle every one you meet, until further notice.

plum 151

PIPETTE. What, like that? [*Makes kissing noise*]
Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Yes, like that!

PIPETTE. But people will think it so odd. Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Yes, they'll be surprised at first.

PIPETTE. But I say, gentlemen and all? Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Yes, gentlemen and all.

PIPETTE. But they won't like it!

OLD LADY. Oh no, they won't mind it.

PIPETTE. But I'm so shy! I can't look at a gentleman without blushing. Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Oh, you'll get over your shyness after a year or two of that sort of thing.

PIPETTE. Kiss me! Oh dear, oh dear, I don't know what people will say. Kiss me!

OLD LADY. I do. They'll say you quiet ones are always the worst. And so you are.

[*Enter BOOMBLEHARDT from inn.*]

PIPETTE. Oh dear, here's that disgusting old wretch, Boombleshardt. I hate the sight of him.
[*To BOOMBLEHARDT*] Kiss me.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Certainly, my dear. [*Kisses her.*]

PIPETTE. How dare you take such a liberty! You insolent old man! Kiss me.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Again! Why, of course. [*Kisses her.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, you disgusting old man! [*Boxes his*

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

ears.] I'll tell my aunt, and she'll turn you out of doors, and you shall be hooted through the village. Kiss me.

BOOMBLEHARDT [*puzzled*]. Thank you—no more this morning.

PIPETTE. Thank you, I'm sure! Oh dear, oh dear! What shall I do? [*Exit, crying into house.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. What a very strange girl.

OLD LADY [*seated*]. I am a very strange girl.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Ah—I was not referring to you. But I want a word with you. I want to make a bargain with you.

OLD LADY. Well, get on.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Well, Mistress Martha has sent me to induce you to go; but I don't want to do anything of the kind. I want you to stay. So if you'll fall in with my views, I'll do all I can to prevent their turning you out.

OLD LADY. Well, what are your views?

BOOMBLEHARDT. You have the wonderful gift of living without food.

OLD LADY. Yes—I have that gift.

BOOMBLEHARDT. For the last fifty years I've been trying to master that wonderful secret, but in vain. It's true I've brought myself down to one hard-boiled egg and a tea-cup full of soup *per diem*, but I find even that a great drain on my resources. Now, if you'll teach me how to live comfortably—I don't say

luxuriously, but comfortably—on nothing at all, I'll give you—yes, I'll give you a guinea!

OLD LADY. You'll give me a guinea?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes—half down and half by a bill at six months. Well, come—say a guinea down. There, look at it! A whole guinea! Weigh it! Taste it! Look at the milling. Oh, it's a beautiful guinea! [*She takes it and tests it.*]

OLD LADY. You're a very mean old man, and you must be punished for it. You'll have the goodness to go on offering guineas from your long bag to every one you meet, until further notice.

BOOMBLEHARDT. What, like this—Allow me to offer you a guinea?

OLD LADY. Thank you. [*Takes it.*] Yes, like that.

BOOMBLEHARDT. To every one I meet?

OLD LADY. Yes, to every one you meet.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me to offer you a guinea!

OLD LADY. With pleasure, Mr. Boombleshardt. [*Takes it.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT [*in dismay*]. But people who don't know me will think I'm making them a present!

OLD LADY. No doubt of it.

BOOMBLEHARDT. But I never made a present in my life!

OLD LADY. Then it's high time you began [*Going.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Are you going?

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

OLD LADY. Yes, I have some charms to work.

BOOMBLEHARDT. I don't see them. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

OLD LADY. Thank you—don't go that way or you'll meet Peter. Now to have a word or two with Mistress Martha. [*Exit into inn.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Here's a pretty state of things! Ruin stares me in the face!

[*Enter SERGEANT.*]

SERGEANT. I must see the old lady—I can't stand this any longer. [*Sees BOOMBLEHARDT and begins to duck and back.*] Don't! Don't!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me, sir, to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT. You're very good, but—Don't, don't!

BOOMBLEHARDT. I can't help it—I must! An irresistible impulse compels me to keep on going like this. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT [*taking it*]. Please understand that when I say "don't", I don't mean "don't"; I say "don't" because an irresistible impulse compels me to say "don't! don't!"

BOOMBLEHARDT. Don't be frightened, young man, I am not going to hurt you.

SERGEANT. Don't! don't!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Not for worlds.

SERGEANT. I tell you I say "don't" in compliance with an irresistible impulse. It's a spell.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Dear me, this is extremely curious.

[*Sitting and examining* SERGEANT *critically through eye-glass, as he bobs and ducks all over the stage.*] A purely reflex action of the muscles of the neck and shoulders. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT. Don't, don't! I wish you'd go.

BOOMBLEHARDT. My dear sir, I may as well hand my guineas to you as to anybody else; and you amuse me very much, you make me laugh. Ha! ha!

SERGEANT. Hang the fellow, how shall I get rid of him? Stop, here's Pipette—I have it! I'll back from Pipette on to him!

[*Enter* PIPETTE *from house.* SERGEANT *turns to her and backs from her on to BOOMBLEHARDT's toes.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Here, I say, sir, look where you're coming to!

[SERGEANT *backs him off the stage.*]

SERGEANT. Thank heaven he's gone at last!

PIPETTE [*to* SERGEANT]. Kiss me!

SERGEANT. Eh? [*Ducking.*] Don't!

PIPETTE. I can't help it. Kiss me!

SERGEANT. Don't! Don't!

PIPETTE. Don't be angry, sergeant, but it's an irresistible impulse. Kiss me!

SERGEANT. I'm not angry—I like it. Don't, don't!
[*Enter* PETER, *squaring.*]

PETER. Hallo, Jenny, kissing Sergeant Klooque! Come on!

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

PIPETTE. Please, Peter, I can't help it. It's an irresistible impulse. Kiss me! [*to PETER.*]

PETER. Come on! Come on! [*Squaring—he squares at SERGEANT who ducks.*]

PIPETTE. Oh dear, oh dear, they're going to fight about me. My character will be gone in no time!

PETER. Come on! Come on!

SERGEANT. Don't, don't!

PETER. Please don't be angry, sergeant, but I'm compelled to hit you. I am acting under an irresistible impulse.

SERGEANT. And don't suppose I'm ducking and dodging because I'm afraid of you. I, too, am acting under an irresistible impulse.

[*Enter BOOMBLEHARDT.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT [*to SERGEANT*]. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT. Sir, I have great pleasure in taking it.

[*PETER hits BOOMBLEHARDT on the back.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT [*to PETER*]. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

PETER. A guinea? Thank you! Come on!

BOOMBLEHARDT [*to PIPETTE*]. Pipette, allow me to offer you a guinea.

PIPETTE. You're a disreputable old scamp! Kiss me, kiss me!

[*Enter MARTHA and VILLAGERS from inn.*]

MARTHA [*to VILLAGERS, pushing them all away*]. Go away! Go away! Get out of this—get out of this!

SERGEANT [*ducking*]. Why, Martha, what's the matter?

MARTHA. Don't be frightened, Sergeant—I don't mean it. I tried with my three servants just now to make the old lady go, and she compels us to turn everybody out of my inn until further notice. Why, I shall be ruined! Go away—get out of this. [*To one and all in succession.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me, madam, to offer you a guinea.

MARTHA. Certainly; thank you—go away.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Another.

MARTHA. Thank you—go away. [*To the others.*] Go away—get out of this—go away.

PIPETTE [*to SERGEANT*]. Kiss me, kiss me!

PETER [*to SERGEANT*]. Come on, come on!

SERGEANT. Don't, don't, don't!

MARTHA. Go away! go away—get out of this—go away!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me to offer you a guinea [*to all in succession.*]

[*Enter OLD LADY from inn—they all rush to her.*]

MARTHA [*pushing her*]. Go away—go away!

VILLAGERS. Get out of this—go away!

PETER. Come on, come on!

SERGEANT [*apart from the others*]. Don't, don't!

PIPETTE. Kiss me! Kiss me! [*trying to kiss OLD LADY*].

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me to offer you a guinea.
[*They hustle her about the stage.*]

OLD LADY. Stop! Stop! Stop! [*They all desist.*]
I release you all. [*All relapse.*] I can manage you
separately, but altogether you're too many for me!
The spell is removed!

MARTHA. Then you'll go?

OLD LADY [*sulkily*]. Yes—I'll go.

PIPETTE [*to SERGEANT*]. Then you're not a coward?

SERGEANT. A coward? No! And you don't
want to kiss everybody?

PIPETTE. Kiss everybody? No! [*To PETER*] And
you're not a brave man?

PETER. A brave man? No! [*To MARTHA*] And
you don't want to turn everybody out of your inn?

MARTHA. Out of my inn? No! [*To BOOMBLE-
HARDT*] And you don't want to give everybody a
guinea?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Give everybody a guinea? No,
I'll be hanged if I do!

Finale.

ALL. Go away, ma'am, go away, ma'am,
Go away, ma'am, good day!

OLD LADY. Defeated
And ill-treated,
I'm vindictive as you'll find,



W. S. GILBERT

So prepare you,
For to spare you
I am not at all inclined!

ALL. Go away, ma'am, go away, ma'am,
Go away, ma'am, good day!

[They hustle her out of the gate.]

CURTAIN.

Treasuries of Modern Prose

Selected by

H. A. TREBLE, M.A.

SELECTIONS FROM THE PROSE WORKS OF J. M. BARRIE.

SELECTIONS FROM THE PLAYS OF J. M. BARRIE.

KRAG, THE KOOTENAY RAM, and other Animal Stories.

THE CUTE COYOTE, and other Animal Stories.

DR. THORNDYKE INVESTIGATES.

SELECTIONS FROM EARLY PROSE WORKS OF H. G. WELLS.

FROM DAVID COPPERFIELD TO DAVID BLAIZE.

MODERN DETECTIVE STORIES.

FIRST AND SECOND SERIES.

MODERN LITERARY ESSAYS.

MODERN SHORT PLAYS.

FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD SERIES.

MODERN SHORT STORIES.

TALES OF THE AIR.

TALES OF HIDDEN TREASURE.

TALES OF PIRATES AND HIGHWAYMEN.

TALES OF THE SEA.

A BOOK OF QUEER STORIES.